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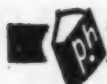
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APRIL 1954

Number 7

Costain and Company: The Historical Novel Today

JOHN T. FREDERICK¹

I THINK that it is asking a good deal of people in these busy, practical times, to go back with you for half a dozen or more generations, and to lose themselves among strange customs and among strange people in a strange land": thus William Dean Howells, in July of 1887, to the young reporter who had asked his opinion of historical fiction. In this interview and in his essays of this time in *Harper's Magazine* Howells expressed his gratified belief that the reading public, tired of romance, was turning at last to realism. But in that same year many thousands of American readers were finding delightful excitement in H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*; and before the next decade was over Howells sadly recognized the triumphantly resurgent flood of historical romance. In the 1920's, when flags were flying for Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* and Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, Margaret Mitchell was already at work on *Gone with the Wind*

and Hervey Allen was meditating the tactics of *Anthony Adverse*. And at the end of 1953, while one publisher proclaimed with pride the sale of three hundred thousand copies of James Jones's *From Here to Eternity* (whatever Mr. Jones may be said to write, it is not historical romance), another publisher blandly noted that sales of Thomas B. Costain's *The Silver Chalice* had passed the two-million mark. It seems as true today as it was when Edward Everett Hale, Jr., wrote of historical romance some fifty years ago that "the time when realism was not the one thing needful, when naturalism seemed unnatural, when psychology was captured by the laboratory" is for many people "a very happy time."

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¹ University of Notre Dame; author of *Handbook of Short Story Writing*; editor, *Out of the Midwest*; radio commentator.

lushness than before. A look at some of its current manifestations will discover certain partial novelties along with much that is staunchly conventional. It may also suggest some of the reasons for the historical novel's recurring popularity and for its wide acceptance today.

Alfred Sumner Bradford, in another contemporary critical comment on the spate of historical fiction of fifty years ago, proposed as a criterion for the true historical novel that it should be "one which has to do with the greater events, the larger forces, that make history." The books of Thomas B. Costain meet this requirement. *Ride with Me* (1944) traces the major events of the Napoleonic period and at the same time portrays the beginnings of modern newspaper journalism: the introduction of power presses, of war correspondents, and of private news agencies. *The Black Rose* (1945) reflects some of the effects of contact between West and East following the Crusades and tells of the first paper-making in England; at the same time it presents the popular unrest and the conflict between classes in the days of Edward the First—"the greatest of English kings in my humble opinion," Costain calls him in the Introduction to this novel. Jacques Coeur of *The Moneyman* (1947) is the first modern merchant, inventor of the department store and pioneer of big business; with his help and advice, gunpowder is used successfully for the first time in European warfare to drive the British out of Rouen under France's Charles VII. In *High Towers* (1949) the subject is the conquest and settlement of New France and Louisiana under the D'Ibervilles. *The Silver Chalice* (1952) is built around the earliest development of Christianity. Indeed, in their subject matter the novels of Costain follow the most

clearly defined traditions of the historical novel, most notably *The Silver Chalice* in its relation to *Ben-Hur*, *Quo Vadis*, and *The Robe*.

The three novels which Costain published in the middle 1940's—*Ride with Me*, *The Black Rose*, and *The Moneyman*—have a common theme to such a degree that they are significantly related even though they deal with different centuries. That theme is social change, "the rise of the common man" and the fall of chivalry, the abatement of privilege based on birth. The French artillerymen who serve the bombards at the siege of Rouen in *The Moneyman*—crude weapons, these primitive mortars, prone to explode and kill the wrong people—call themselves the New Men. One of them tells Jacques Coeur:

"We're all rather amused over the follies of the past. Chivalry? It has been the absurdity of the ages. . . . We are revolutionary in our ideas, my lord. Even you might be shocked at some of the things we believe."

"I doubt it. . . . You see, I am revolutionary in my ideas also."

In *Ride with Me* the battle for social reforms contends in the hero's interest with his pursuit of the French heroine. He is a British newspaper publisher who meets with a consistent affirmative the questions of his young editor:

"Don't you realize, Frank, that this world we live in needs to be turned completely inside out and made over from top to bottom before it will be fit for human beings to live in? That almost everything we do, or the way we do it, is wrong and cruel and wasteful? And that nothing can be done about it until we have a free and enlightened press?"

The clearest statement of this central and unifying theme of the three novels is in *The Black Rose*:

"The heart of mankind is sound. . . . We heard peasants singing in the fields as we passed yesterday. There is honesty in them, and a

great courage. Perhaps the change will begin at the bottom. . . . It will take longer that way; but it will come surely."

I believe that one reason for the wide acceptance of Costain's work is the fact that, stripped to essentials, his novels are based on the force that is at the core of modern history.

From the technical point of view the chief strength of Costain's fiction is structural. His power lies less in elaborate plot than in unflinching control of a comparatively simple and straightforward narrative, the maintenance of a strong story line. This achievement is in part a matter of point of view. In most cases the action of a Costain novel is viewed through a single pair of eyes. When shifts are unavoidable, as in *The Black Rose* when Walter of Gurnie is already in England and his half-Oriental wife is making the long journey from Cathay to rejoin him, the changes in point of view are unmistakable, and no confusion results. The clear, positive, and sustained forward flow of action which marks every novel of Costain distinguishes his work from that of many of his contemporaries. There are few supernumerary characters in Costain's work and few dispensable incidents. Here we may note a contrast to the work of Samuel Shellabarger, especially as it is seen in his most recent novel, *Lord Vanity* (1953). The whole first part of this book is given over to the establishment of an atmosphere the specific elements of which are soon abandoned and to the rather detailed revelation of a group of characters most of whom are dropped when the scene changes. Somewhat the same accumulation of brilliant but partially irrelevant detail—irrelevant so far as the story as story is concerned—marks the portion of the book which has its setting at

Bath. Possibly it is because Shellabarger was historian before he was novelist, and a specialist in the period shown in *Lord Vanity* (he wrote a biography of Lord Chesterfield), that he has in this novel somewhat overcrowded his stage both with furniture and with people. His earlier novels have less of this effect. In Costain's work characters as well as details of setting are almost invariably functional in relation to the story proper. Only most rarely does he employ a detail or a character merely as a means of filling in his picture of the times. In *The Silver Chalice* the entertainer who introduces at Nero's banquet a new kind of dancing (a minor example of the pervasive theme of social change) seems at first to be present merely to give substance to the portrayal of the court; but it is her death by torture, after she has admitted that she is a Christian, that finally seals the hero's own conversion. There is scarcely a page in Costain's work on which nothing happens; and nothing happens which does not in some way advance or contribute to the robust forward march of the story as a whole.

Another observable common denominator in Costain's work may contribute to its appeal: the fact that most of his heroes are marked by some kind of human imperfection. They contend not only with physical antagonists and obstacles. Their gravest conflicts arise from factors in their own lives. Francis Ellery of *Ride with Me* has a crippled knee. Walter of Gurnie in *The Black Rose* is illegitimate. Jacques Coeur, the "moneyman," is of low birth in a world ruled by nobles. Basil of *The Silver Chalice* is the son of a poor artisan and is for a time a slave. These men have abundant physical courage and are capable of appropriate feats of skill or endurance.

But they are interesting not solely or primarily for these aspects of their characters—much less for their sexual prowess. Their greatest triumphs are over intangible foes, and their singularity is of mind and spirit rather than of brawn.

The *fidus Achates* is an ancient figure of historical romance. Costain's novels display the traditional complement of devoted retainers who accomplish assorted miracles of assistance in the exploits of the heroes. More significant are the friendships between men of equal powers which are prominent in his pages: friendships which in some cases cross boundaries of wealth and rank and thus underline the basic social theme of the books. Such friendships are that of Walter of Gurnie and Tristram Griffen, an artisan's son, in *The Black Rose*, and that between the Sire D'Arley and Jacques Coeur in *The Moneyman*. In *Ride with Me* the friendship between Francis Ellery and General Robert Thomas Wilson is so fully developed as to rival the love story in emphasis. Indeed, Costain tells the reader in an introduction that his primary purpose in undertaking the writing of this novel was that of "relating in fiction form the exploits of an unusual soldier who has been allowed to drop from sight." In *The Silver Chalice* this place is filled by the deeply appealing portrayal of St. Luke the Physician in his relation to the youthful sculptor, Basil. Much of the human significance which Costain achieves in his central characters is the result of the development made possible by these relationships.

Women have been the great problem of historical novelists from Scott and Cooper on: until recent times, when certain writers learned how to make them profitable by exploitation of sex.

Emphatically, Costain is not a merchant of sexual thrills. He is not a prude; in his books there is no suppression of the facts of social history or evasion of those of human nature; but one could delete from his novels every treatment of sexual intercourse without shortening them by more than a score of pages among some four thousand. In a time when a substantial fraction of historical fiction is obviously written primarily as a vehicle for erotic excitement, this is a distinction in itself. Costain's feminine characters, like most of those in the tradition of the historical novel, are generally inferior in vitality and convincingness to his men. Yet he has worked hard on them and has achieved more successes than most writers in this field; the "black rose," Maryam, is one of these successes—purely a creature of romance, incredible in almost every aspect, and yet alive, and hard to forget.

In the fashion of their telling Costain's novels are marked by a comfortable adequacy rather than by brilliance or beauty. His style is unobtrusive. Only rarely do pictures stand out, like that of the French countryside after the Hundred Years' War at the beginning of *The Moneyman*. He can sketch a group of characters with swift, definitive strokes as in the group of refugees at the Portuguese camp in *Ride with Me*. But for the most part the contribution of Costain's style is less in enriching or intensifying the reader's imaginative experience than in a negative virtue: it doesn't get in the way. In this, too, he conforms to the traditional qualities of historical romance, which has rarely displayed distinction in style. Readers have not demanded, perhaps have not wanted, the words that would image for them with real intensity the sensations felt by the characters or the rhythms

that would involve them deeply in the characters' emotions. They have been content—perhaps better content—in reading as observers rather than as vicarious participants.

"Spectacle" is the word that expresses the essence of traditional historical romance: spectacle as distinguished from drama. Its readers have not asked of historical romance that it should take them into the heart of the action and make them one with the characters in their dangers and their delights. They have been happy to look on. From Scott and Cooper to Shellabarger and Costain, historical romance has been written and has been enjoyed primarily as spectacle. To this end we have the ever-forward movement: no one likes to see a parade stand still. To this end are the bold and bright colors, the sharp differentiations of characters, the strong but always changing patterns of action, the plain, transparent style. In the best of historical romance the spectacle has meaning: in its totality it achieves grasp of an age, illustration of a general truth of human nature. It is such historical fiction that Costain offers his readers.

It may be worth while to note that science fiction—the stories of space ships and interplanetary war which today vie in popularity with costume romance—are, like it, essentially spectacle rather than drama. Science fiction is, indeed, actually historical romance—but of the future rather than of the past. Like the traditional historical novel, science fiction enables the reader to watch a colorful and exciting story as though on a television screen—and with no intense or lasting involvement. There is a significant difference between such spectator entertainment and the profound and often painful participation

demanded of the reader by another kind of fiction.

The historical novel can, of course, be this other kind of fiction—drama rather than spectacle. It is quite possible for the creative imagination to carry the reader to another time and another place, not merely to look but to live. When this happens with wholeness, with intensity, we have the mountain peaks of the historical novel: *War and Peace*, *Kristin Lavransdatter*. Historical fiction as drama demands of the writer, essentially, a keener interest in people as human persons, a deeper insight and broader understanding, a greater power over words, than does historical fiction as spectacle. The line between, however, is anything but hard and fast, the difference no matter of black and white: there is much of drama—in the sense in which the term is here applied—in Scott, in Cooper, in Costain; there are stretches of pure spectacle in *War and Peace*, even in *Kristin Lavransdatter*. Yet there is a primary difference in intention which the thoughtful reader will not be slow to perceive.

In recent years there have appeared in some number novels in which clearly the intention has been to enable the reader to share, rather than merely to see, the life of another age. Among these are four remarkable books all dealing with British history and all written by Englishwomen. First came *The Golden Warrior* (1949), by Hope Muntz, most noteworthy for its characterization of Harold of England (the "golden warrior") and William of Normandy. Next was *The Golden Hand* (1950), by Edith Simon, exuberantly rich in sensory detail of everyday life in manor and croft and appropriate in its vast sweep of character and incident to its central theme, the building of one of

the great cathedrals. Then came another story of the Conquest, *The Fourteenth of October* (1952), by a writer who calls herself Bryher (her more recent book, *The Player's Boy* [1953], seems to me definitely inferior to the earlier one). Most recent of the group and in some ways most impressive is *The Man on a Donkey* (1953), by M. F. H. Prescott, with its moving and intimate day-by-day chronicle of the tragic days of Henry VIII and the popular revolt known as the Pilgrimage of Grace.

These novels display two widely different ways of arriving at the same end: the reader's intense and meaningful vicarious experience of a past time. *The Golden Warrior*, *The Golden Hand*, and *The Man on a Donkey* are long novels, of many incidents and many characters. In each the appeal of a strong and central story line has been sacrificed in favor of the building-up of a number of parallel and related sequences of events with interlocking characters. The intention—very largely achieved in all three of these novels—is to give the reader such rich and deep emotional participation in each of the many incidents that his interest will survive the shifts. Only the most sensitive selection and most lively rendering of detail can make this possible. The burden falls primarily, of course, upon style. In *The Fourteenth of October* Bryher employs a method wholly different. This is a short novel—barely one-sixth the length of *The Man on a Donkey*. The whole body of experience (centering around the Battle of Hastings) is viewed through the consciousness of one character, a Saxon boy who has been established so firmly that participation in his attitudes and emotions is easy for the reader. The style, though not overly suggestive of the archaic, shows careful shaping.

Such brief, realistic, sharply focused historical fiction is not so much a novelty as some comments on Bryher have suggested. Notable is the prior work of Janet Lewis in *The Wife of Martin Guerre* and *The Trial of Sören Qvist*—brief novels so extraordinary in their precise and coldly passionate re-creation of both surface and depth in time that they rank at the very top in our recent historical fiction.

It is possible in this field, in some degree, to have our cake and eat it too: the line of demarcation between spectacle and drama in historical fiction is by no means one of mutual exclusion, and a book can in a measure share the virtues of both purposes and both effects. Better than in any other work of our time I know, this union is achieved in the fiction of Esther Forbes. Her novels are first of all about people. One remembers from them the characters, the human situations—like people we know and the troubles they get themselves into. It is only at second glance, in our memory of these books, that we are aware that the clothes these people wear are different from ours and then realize that each group of them centers a world of houses and food and tools and tasks and faith and thought remote from our own: the very early Colonial days of *Paradise*; the Revolutionary War years of *The General's Lady*; the glory and decline of Salem and the clipper ships in *The Running of the Tide*; the same early decades of the nineteenth century in inland New England in *Rainbow on the Road*, the latest and to my mind the best of them all.

Modern historical scholarship is swiftly accumulating new resources for writers of historical fiction. At the same time these writers are trying new methods,

perhaps embarking on a course of experimentation in technique comparable to that which the realistic novel of contemporary life has undergone in the last forty years. Miss Forbes's new novel employs a most interesting point of view, that of a shrewdly observant young boy who is friend and companion to the itinerant untaught portrait painter with whom the novel is chiefly concerned. In structure *The Man on a*

Donkey is remotely reminiscent of John Dos Passos' *U.S.A.*, especially in the interjected biographical sketches. The results of such experiments will be interesting to watch. We may safely expect that at the same time historical romances traditional in both substance and method will continue to find their many readers; we may be grateful if these readers are often as well served as they are by the books of Thomas Costain.

Suspense and Foreknowledge in "Beowulf"

CHARLES MOORMAN¹

ONE of the main results of Professor J. R. R. Tolkien's appeal for a new and more overtly literary look at *Beowulf*² has been that critics of the poem have directed critical attention toward the poet's apparent violation of one of the supposed "laws" of fiction—the creation and maintenance of dramatic suspense. It is beyond doubt that the *Beowulf* poet "telegraphs his punches" in the accounts of Beowulf's encounters with his three supernatural opponents by foreshadowing, quite explicitly, the results of those combats.³ While no one would deny that this foreshadowing lessens, to a degree, the suspense which the modern reader expects to feel concerning the battles, to many readers this lack of suspense presents an insurmountable obstacle in the poem. Klaeber, one would judge, feels

somewhat this way. In remarking that "evidently disregard of the element of suspense was not considered a defect of story telling" to the *Beowulf* poet's audience,⁴ he implies that this disregard of suspense is most certainly a defect in modern storytelling. Professor W. W. Lawrence asserts that there was no need for this sort of suspense in the first place, since the three encounters were well known to the poet's audience;⁵ while, on the other hand, Professor J. R. Hulbert insists that, in all probability, the stories were unfamiliar to the Old English audience, and so seems to blame the poet.⁶ No one of these views, however, really settles the question of suspense in *Beowulf*, since, whether the story was known or unknown, the *Beowulf* poet quite definitely lets the cat out of the bag. It would seem, therefore, that before discussing

¹ Alabama Polytechnic Institute, Auburn, Alabama.

² J. R. R. Tolkien, "Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics," *Proceedings of the British Academy*, XXII (1936), 245-95.

³ See Adrien Bonjour, "The Use of Anticipation in *Beowulf*," *RES*, XVI (1940), 290-301, for a detailed account of these foreshadowing passages.

⁴ Fr. Klaeber, *Beowulf* (Boston: D. C. Heath & Co., 1941), p. lvii.

⁵ W. W. Lawrence, *Beowulf and the Epic Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1930), p. 28.

⁶ J. R. Hulbert, "Beowulf and the Classical Epic," *MP*, XLIV (1946), 70.

the problem of suspense and foreknowledge in *Beowulf*, we need first of all to investigate the relationship which exists between foreknowledge and suspense in literature generally and in the epic in particular.

I do not intend to indulge in amateur audience psychology for long, but I cannot resist two modern analogies—the radio and screen “suspense” stories and what I am forced to call the “literary” detective story. In order to gain the effect of immediacy and to promote audience-actor identification, the radio suspense story is sometimes narrated by the hero in the first person. Generally he begins by remarking that his premature baldness was caused by an encounter with Mount Everest, and from that point on, the story goes its own imaginative way in flashback. However, it is obvious from the beginning of the tale that the hero did in fact live through the horrors of the climb and that he lost nothing more vital than a few hairs; the audience thus knows the outcome of the story. Yet can it be said that this sort of tale necessarily lacks suspense for this reason? Again, everyone knew upon entering the theater for a performance of the motion picture that the scientists would eventually overcome the “Thing”; yet, at the performance which I witnessed, the dialogue was often drowned by adult gasps and screams.

With the sophisticated detective story we come closer to the problem. The literary detective story differs from the ordinary “who-done-it” in that the reader and/or the detective knows the identity of the killer from the beginning. The reader is thus occupied with watching the detective’s gradual arrival at the solution which the reader already knows; or with watching the detective’s effort to prove his theory correct; or, most sophisticated

of all, with watching the killer suffer as the agents of justice close in on him. *Crime and Punishment* is, of course, an example of the last of these three methods which succeeds in becoming more than just a detective story. The reader knows that Raskolnikov will eventually be taken, but I doubt whether this knowledge in any way lessens his interest in the novel.

What I am saying is nothing new; all the critics of the novel have said approximately the same thing. “Story” considered as a chain of events and depending entirely on suspense or interest in what happens next is not of any major importance in any artistic production beyond the level of the “who-done-it” and the western movie. Certainly no reader ever read Trollope or Jane Austen or, especially, Henry James because he wanted to know what happened next; and I doubt, moreover, that the *Beowulf* audience listened with this only in mind.

But these factors do not necessarily answer the primary question raised by this paper. Even if we say that foreshadowing does not destroy suspense, we must still account for the presence of the foreshadowing elements in *Beowulf*.

Comparative studies have shown a number of marked resemblances between *Beowulf* and the *Aeneid*, of which Lawrence says, expressing, I think, the scholarly consensus, that, while “the influence of Vergil may be regarded as entirely possible, it cannot be conclusively established.”⁷ Nevertheless, as Lawrence says, “the manners and customs of the Trojan war—and this applies to the Homeric poems as well as to the *Aeneid*—are often like those of Hrothgar and Higelac and their cohorts.”⁸ Klaeber, speaking of the epic generally, remarks

⁷ Lawrence, *op. cit.*, p. 285.

⁸ *Ibid.*

that "the most important influence to be recognized is, after all, the new conception of a true epic poem which the Anglo-Saxon, very likely, learned from the Roman classic."⁹ Whether or not we assume a direct relationship between the two epics, there does exist a feature common to both of them which bears upon our problem here. The reader knows from the opening lines that Aeneas will win through and establish Rome:

Arma virumque cano, Troiae qui primus ab oris
Italiam fato profugus, Laviniaque venit
litora, multum ille et terris iactatus et alto
vi superum, saevae memorem Iunonis ob iram,
multa quoque et bello passus, dum conderet
urbem

inferretque deos Latio, genus unde Latinum
Albanique patres atque altae moenia Romae.¹⁰

Throughout the *Aeneid* this note of "*fato profugus*" persists, and it is no secret to the reader that Aeneas will eventually overcome all his difficulties. At every major turn of the plot—the escape from Troy, the love affair with Dido, the war with Turnus—we are reminded of the inflexible destiny which impels Aeneas, at times against his will, toward Italy.¹¹ Yet it is clear that far from detracting from the epic, this element of fate gives it purpose and meaning. In the Homeric epics we are convinced from the outset by the statements of the gods that Troy must be destroyed and that, in spite of all hardships, Odysseus must reach Ithaca. Yet surely this foreknowledge does not lessen our excitement in watching the killing of Hector or the adventure with Circe. It is clear, I think, that the dominance of fate in some form or other is a part of what we usually style the "epic tradition." The presence of fate in

the epic keeps before the reader the idea of a purposive force, continually directing the progress of the reader. It is a reminder to the reader that the struggles are not in vain but are directed toward a preconceived end. In short, the very nature of the epic demands an ordered cosmos and a purposeful deity and, in demonstration of these, foreshadowing statements.

Professor Bonjour has suggested something of the same argument by noting of *Beowulf* that almost all of the foreshadowings in the poem involve either Fate or God, terms which are almost synonymous in the poem.¹² "We know [the outcome of the struggles], but they [the characters within the poem] don't, and thus they appear to us as the playthings of fate; we feel and are constantly reminded of its looming above those mortal heads, above the sleepy warrior lying down for rest unconscious of his doom."¹³ But while Bonjour is unwilling, whether wisely or not, to push his argument as far as it will go, Professor Charles Kennedy has suggested an allegorical interpretation of the poem which makes use of the same general principle: "The tragic glory of the conflict [with the fire dragon] is its illustration of man's heroic war with powers of darkness and evil beyond his strength. . . . Twice in a heroic lifetime, mortal valor was pitted in crucial conflict with the ravaging forces of evil. Twice a hero turned back the invading dark. In his youth he conquered and lived; in age he conquered and died."¹⁴ The foreshadowings which carry the idea of an operative destiny and which, as I have said, are a

⁹ Klaeber, *op. cit.*, p. cxviii.

¹⁰ *Aeneid* i. 1-7.

¹¹ See Cyril Bailey, *Religion in Virgil* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1935), pp. 208-34, for an excellent tracing of the idea of fate within the poem.

¹² Bonjour, *op. cit.*, pp. 295-96.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Charles W. Kennedy, *The Earliest English Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1943), pp. 99-100.

vital part of the epic tradition seem to me to fit perfectly into Kennedy's general scheme. They inform the audience of the presence of an ordering force which can, working through the earthly hero,¹⁵ destroy the supernatural forces of evil and which will guide the hero to his appointed destiny, a rich reign and a heroic death.¹⁶ Thus the *Beowulf* poet's audience may watch the monumental forces of good and evil (surely more real to them than to us) in conflict, confident, because of the foreshadowings, of the triumph of good, both in the career of the hero and in the battle of the heavens.

Let me emphasize what I have said so far: (1) In general, foreknowledge of the basic outcome of a story need not affect to any large extent the element of suspense within the poem. (2) The epic poet uses foreshadowing statements to establish and keep before his audience the idea of an operative and benevolent Fate which controls the actions and destiny of the hero.

If these statements are true, then we still need to consider those elements of suspense which the *Beowulf* poet does include in his accounts of Beowulf's fights. Having purposefully given away the outcome of each of the three battles, the poet must present the battles themselves in such a way as to create an interest in the combats which will not be dependent on foreknowledge of the outcome. Professor R. M. Lumiansky has already shown how in each of the battles the *Beowulf* poet has used a dramatic audience inside the poem, ignorant of the outcome of the fight, to create a suspenseful tension within the poem.¹⁷ Bonjour has

shown that, while the audience knows the outcome, the principals do not and that their ignorance creates suspense in the audience. While these two theories, taken together, seem to me to explain adequately the *Beowulf* poet's method of creating suspense, let me add another observation. In no two of the combats does the poet handle his material in quite the same way; through skilful shifts in point of view he is able to keep his audience interested in the combats themselves, even though the outcome of the battles is well known to them. Let us examine the encounters briefly in order to illustrate this point.

The first of the battles, the encounter with Grendel, is seen by the reader almost entirely through Grendel's eyes and feelings. We get in the whole encounter only four statements which describe Beowulf's actions or feelings during the combat. We see the action from Beowulf's point of view only (1) in the hero's first glimpse of the monster (ll. 736b-38); (2) in his meeting of the monster's attack (748b-49); (3) in his remembrance of his previous boast; and (4) in his attempt to prevent the wounded Grendel from escaping (761b). In the description of the battle proper (710-67a) the poet describes the action from Grendel's point of view, describing his approach, his glimpse of the heroes in the hall, his eating of Hondscio, his pain from Beowulf's grip, his desire to escape. Then, as Lumiansky has shown, the point of view shifts to that of the dramatic audience, the Danes in the hall, who feel regret and terror thinking that Beowulf has lost the fight. Then, after a single reference to Beowulf, describing the hero's unwilling-

¹⁵ See Klaeber's discussion of the Christian coloring of the poem (*op. cit.*, pp. xlvii-li) for corroborative evidence, especially the connections which he makes between Beowulf and Christ.

¹⁶ See ll. 1386-89.

¹⁷ R. M. Lumiansky, "The Dramatic Audience in *Beowulf*," *JEGP*, LI, No. 4 (October, 1952), 545-50. See also Lumiansky's "The Contexts of O.E. 'Ealuscerwen' and 'Meoduscerwen,'" *JEGP*, XLVIII, No. 1 (January, 1949), 116-26.

ness to let the monster escape alive (791-94a), the point of view shifts back to Grendel, his pain and sorrow are described, and the fight ends.

In the second battle, that with Grendel's dam, the poet begins with the same method he had used so effectively in the first fight; the opening lines of the scene describe the scene from the point of view of Grendel's mother (1497-1512a); we see her grasp Beowulf and carry him to her lair. Then, in order to describe the lair, the poet switches to Beowulf's point of view (1512a-17) and remains there for the remainder of the fight, except for a brief return to Grendel's mother about midway in the battle (1541-47a).

In the last and longest of the encounters, that with the fire dragon, the poet again begins from the enemy's point of view (2553-58), shifts to Beowulf (2559-60), to the dragon (2561-62a), to Beowulf (2562b-64a), to both combatants treated together (2564b-65). After this quick shifting backward and forward, Beowulf's point of view is taken up for the remainder of the first encounter (2566-95), except for one line toward the end which expresses the dragon's renewal of confidence (2593-94a).¹⁸ In the last sections of the battle the method is the same; the point of view shifts rapidly back and forth among Beowulf, the dragon, and Wiglaf, Beowulf's faithful companion.

The point to be made is this: the *Beowulf* poet is able to create a good deal of audience interest in the actual battle sequences by maneuvering the possible points of view by which he may describe his scene. In the fight with Grendel he

concentrates on the unusual, describing the battle through Grendel's eyes and emotions, realizing, I think, that such a description will interest his audience far more than a reliance on superficial suspense. In the second episode the poet varies his method, lest this unusual method become usual, by describing Beowulf's reactions as well as those of Grendel's mother. However, in order to keep his audience's interest at this point, the poet (1) makes the fighting more difficult than it was in the first battle and (2) limits his description of the battle to Beowulf's difficulty with his sword, his use of his hands in the combat, and his finding a new sword. This selection of and concentrating on specific battle detail avoids the usual straight-line, chronicle-like descriptions of battles and allows the poet a great deal of poetic freedom which he can utilize to gain dramatic effectiveness. In the third section the poet can fairly dazzle his audience with quick shifts in the point of view and can further vary his battle description by interspersing conversation and by concentrating again on such details as the burning of the shields and the failure of Beowulf's sword.

I am not attempting to say that the *Beowulf* poet is using these novel methods to create suspense; it seems to me that they create an audience appeal which does not depend on mere curiosity as to what happens next but which substitutes for suspense a large measure of genuine dramatic excitement. If the points in this paper are sound, if the foreshadowing statements are necessary in their own right and do not necessarily destroy suspense and interest, then surely the substitution is more than adequate.

¹⁸ The following section in which the point of view shifts to that of the cowardly retainers, who here act as a dramatic audience, has been discussed by Lumiansky in the first of the articles cited above.

The Relationship of Music to "Leaves of Grass"

GEORGIANA POLLAK¹

ALTHOUGH criticism has acknowledged musical influences on Whitman's poetry for some time now, it has yet to clarify certain fundamental points governing the relationship of music to *Leaves of Grass*. We have been informed that music was an influential factor in Whitman's life, that of all musical forms he loved opera best, and that his poetry contains a decidedly musical character. Yet our conception of this relationship remains vague. What is the nature of this relationship between music and the *Leaves*? Does it disclose Whitman's imitation of musical forms? Precisely what musical features in Whitman's poetry establish this relationship? These are significant questions for which we still seek concrete and specific answers.

Unfortunately the present state of criticism offers little aid toward clarifying these points. On the contrary, it seems content with cursory observations of resemblances between music and Whitman's poetry. That this attitude has impeded the problem of relationship is all too evident. Consider, for example, the case of the recitative. The analogy of recitative to *Leaves of Grass* is certainly not new. As far back as 1895, Oscar L. Triggs observed that "in general Whitman employs the method of recitative,"² and others have since recognized the recitative-like character of the *Leaves*. But the true role of the recitative in Whitman's poetry remains concealed in generalities. So far examination of it has not gone beyond noting the recitative-like character to be "irregular but controlled rhythm closely approximating the rhythm of speech, consistent employment of devices of parallelism and reiteration, bardic proclamations and declamatory rhetoric, movement of a passage always by independent lines or phrases."³ This might serve as a description of recitative-like character in Whitman's poetry, but so general are its enumerative suggestions that it might also serve as a summary of Whitman's characteristic devices, ably investigated by Whitman scholars who had no intention of relating Whitman's technique to music. The analogy thus rests on a basis of inexplicable general resemblance.

In analogies to musical forms the same indulgence in generalities has caused no little confusion. Not only is there a variety of analogies lacking clear-cut bases of comparison but there is also an inconsistency and contradiction unnecessarily complicating the bare facts of Whitman's musical background. One study claims

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² *Conservator*, VI (November, 1895), 138.

³ Robert D. Faner, *Walt Whitman and Opera* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1951), p. 167.

that the poem "Proud Music of the Storm" is "constructed on the plan of a symphony," for it is "full of allusions to the music and persons he loved."⁴ However, as this study neglects to explain in what way these allusions reveal a plan or organization of material similar to the symphony and then states that "Whitman had no conception of the musical structures that can be built out of English words or the importance of music in poetry,"⁵ its very claim betrays absurd inferences. Another declares that "Whitman must have been practically a musical illiterate"⁶ but claims that the treatment of themes in the poem "When Lilacs Last in the Door-yard Bloom'd" conforms to the "principle of sonata-form."⁷ In spite of a painstaking enumeration of poetic themes, however, it falls short of establishing connections between poem and sonata. What, for instance, causes the devices of repetition or contrast to function musically rather than poetically? A third, admitting that Whitman had no musical training but nevertheless insisting that he had a fine knowledge of opera,⁸ claims the whole of opera as the influential form in Whitman's poetic creations. Yet, apart from describing musical effects seemingly analogous to Whitman's poetry, it makes no attempt to account for the different musical compositions embraced by opera in terms of poetic compositions. In short, Whitman, despite scant musical knowledge, managed to create, in some mysterious way, a poem based on the plan of a symphony, another conforming to the principle of sonata form, the whole of his poetry on the order of opera. These are some conditions explaining why the appreciation of music in the *Leaves* continues to remain an arbitrary matter and the tenor of criticisms merely impressionistic.

The role of music in *Leaves of Grass* is neither vague nor unexplainable. It presents two distinct aspects: one reveals textual evidences such as poetic allusions to musical forms or performers, poetic employment of musical terms, poetic descriptions of musical effects, all of which belong to the category of conventional poetic uses of music; the other exhibits musical features in the very function of poetry which may be observed in the musical processes of poetic devices. Thus, while the former calls for an examination of textual evidences, the latter necessitates an analysis of technique. If, as it seems generally agreed, however, there is more than the conventional poetic use of musical art in the *Leaves*, an investigation of music will have no other course than to proceed with strict exactitude in detecting musical devices, in determining their individual function, and in perceiving their operation within the poetic structure.

The 1855 edition of *Leaves of Grass* was complete in so far as it contained all the technical devices that Whitman utilized to create a style of his own. None of these devices, as Whitman scholars will affirm, was new—parallelism, catalogue,

⁴ Julia Spiegelman, "Walt Whitman and Music," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, XLI (April, 1942), 172.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁶ Calvin Brown, *Music and Literature: A Comparison of the Arts* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1948), p. 178.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

⁸ Faner, *op. cit.*, pp. 50 and 94.

initial, medial, or final repetition, alliteration, and assonance being but age-old devices of poets. Nevertheless, Whitman's style was new. It revealed a comprehensiveness and versatility hitherto unknown in American poetry. Indeed, it seemed to create both largeness and variety of expression by expanding or contracting, elaborating or compressing, extending or restricting measures while at the same time maintaining them in a unified whole. The most conspicuous feature of this new style was the revelation of an all-embracing motion, and the most vital factor in this motion was musical rhythm.

Exactly when musical art became a part of Whitman's new style will probably remain a matter of conjecture. It is quite likely that his musical inspiration occurred in the years (roughly from the late 1840's to 1855) of his attendance at the opera-houses in Astor Place and Castle Garden,⁹ during which period Whitman is said to have discovered his new technique.¹⁰ How this inspiration came about may be imagined in the light of evidences from Whitman's poetry. According to Matthiessen, "Whitman persisted in feeling connections between oratory, Italian music, and the sea," which together seemed "inevitably and absurdly incompatible."¹¹ But Matthiessen did not perceive the element common to all three analogies, which is, of course, rhythm. And the rhythms most compatible to his poetic thoughts seem to lie in music. Thus, while Whitman sat absorbing the many delights of opera, it may well have occurred to him that rhythms intriguingly similar both to the undulation of the sea and the sweeping movements of oratory seemed to emanate from one feature of Italian opera, namely, the recitative.

It was not the music, then, but the rhetorical element of opera which became the point of contact between music and *Leaves of Grass*. The recitative, defined as "a vocal style designed to imitate and to emphasize the natural inflections of speech,"¹² is usually applied to prose texts of the opera. Similarly emphasizing the inflections of speech, the fundamental technique of the *Leaves* seeks primarily to create the conversational quality of prose. In character the monotonous chantlike reiteration and irregular prose rhythms of the *Leaves* bear a striking resemblance to the "speech-like reiteration of the same note, slight inflections, short groups of quick notes, irregular rhythms, purely syllabic treatment of the text"¹³ of recitative. This resemblance is not fortuitous. An examination of the nature and function of rhythm in the *Leaves* will strongly suggest Whitman's deliberate transference of some devices of recitative to his poetic technique.

In *Leaves of Grass* the structure of the line plainly discloses the recitative origins of Whitman's rhythm. As Sculley Bradley has pointed out, the Whitmanian line is constructed on a system of accents.¹⁴ This means that, despite its seemingly limitless

⁹ F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 558.

¹⁰ Gay Wilson Allen, *American Prosody* (New York: American Book Co., 1935), p. 242.

¹¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 549-50.

¹² Willi Apel, *Harvard Dictionary of Music* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947), p. 629.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ "The Fundamental Metrical Principle in Whitman's Poetry," *American Literature*, X (1939), 445.

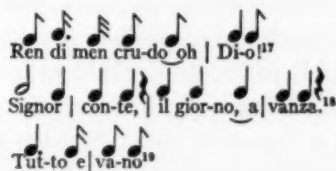
freedom, the line moves freely only within the framework of accentual regularity. Normally the accents of words provide regularity, but frequently Whitman uses a device called by Bradley the "hovering accent," whose metrical function is to include two or more words within the scope of one syllable, as, for example:

Which of the young men does she like the best?

Or:

Streaming tears, sobbing tears, throes, chok'd with wild cries.¹⁵

In opera this device appears to have originated from the peculiarity of the Italian language. According to Edward J. Dent, "when one word ends in a vowel (as almost all Italian words do) and the next begins with a vowel, the two coalesce and are regarded as one syllable for metrical purposes."¹⁶ Thus such instances of this device as



are common. In recitative, where words appear in rapid succession, the frequent occurrence of such a device would easily seem a stylistic mark. At any rate, Whitman must have detected its practical value, for in the *Leaves*, as in recitative, this device serves as a regulative factor in an otherwise wholly prose rhythm.

In contrast to the "hovering accent," extrametrical syllables allow a wide range of free movement. Those in Whitman's lines usually fall into groups of twos and threes. Section 1 of "Song of Myself"²⁰ contains sufficient evidence of these types. The first line moves in regular short-long pattern:

I celebrate myself and sing myself.

The next line moves in variations of short-long and short-short-long:

And what I assume you shall assume.

Further on there are three extrametrical syllables:

My tongue, every (atom of my blood . . .).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 449.

¹⁶ "The Translations of Operas," *Musical Association: Proceedings, Session 61* (1934-35), p. 91.

¹⁷ Gioachino Rossini, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (New York: G. Schirmer, n.d.), p. 15.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

²⁰ *Leaves of Grass*, Emory Holloway's ed.

Similarly in recitative the short-long pattern follows the accents of words.



Through these extrametrical syllables the poet enhances his power of expression in two ways: first, he may hurry or slow down movement by means of tempo; second, he may freely choose words that seem pertinent to his subject without worrying over their metrical adaptability.

Thus, accentual regularity notwithstanding, the rhythm emerging from Whittmanian lines will be predominantly proselike in character. Like recitative rhythm, its main outlines are plainly delineated by prose devices. In *Leaves of Grass*, as in recitative, a common prose device is the parenthetical aside which helps to punctuate the rhythmic flow. This device is particularly effective in the *Leaves* when it follows a long series of similar lines, simultaneously breaking the monotony of the proselike flow of words and providing a change of tone. Another prose device performing a similar function is the pause which breaks the large movement into smaller units. In recitative these are normal pauses in speech.

Don Giovanni. Leporello.

Le - po - rel - lo, where are you? I'm here, to my mis - for - tune, and

Don Giovanni. Leporello. Don Giovanni.

you Sir? I'm here. who's dead, th'old man, or you, Sir? O most

Leporello.

stu - pid of questions, he sure-ly. Well done, the in - ten - tion was pret-ty,²⁴

So are they in the *Leaves*

Do you take it I would astonish? (pause)
Does the day light astonish? (pause) Does the early redstart, (pause)
twittering through the woods? (pause)
Do I astonish more than they? (pause)²⁵

²¹ G. Donizetti, *Lucia di Lammermoor* (New York: G. Schirmer, n.d.), p. 13.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

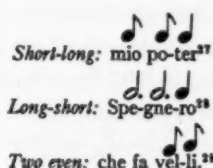
²⁴ Mozart, *Don Giovanni* (New York: G. Schirmer, n.d.), p. 19.

²⁵ "Song of Myself," Sec. 19.

This prose-like rhythm, however, both in recitative and in the *Leaves*, may acquire poetic features. The pause, for example, in conjunction with accent often produces a poetic effect. In the lines—

Twenty-eight young men bathe by the shore,
Twenty-eight young men and all so friendly;
Twenty-eight years of womanly life and all so lonesome.—²⁶

there appears at the end of the first line a short-long pattern (*the shore*), at the end of the second, long-short (*friendly*), and at the end of the third, two even beats (*lonesome*), which together with the comma (short pause), semicolon (longer pause), and period (full pause), respectively, create chantlike cadences. The same effect may be obtained in recitative, as the notation of the following cadences indicates:



Poetic devices also participate in the movements of this proselike rhythm when it becomes necessary to amplify, to connect, or to extend. Such particular uses of poetic devices again suggest Whitman's transference of recitative devices, and in fact one need only examine the librettos published around the year 1847 to find many a parallel to the devices employed in the *Leaves*. The three types of repetitive patterns which Autrey N. Wiley³⁰ finds in *Leaves of Grass*

(1) *Initial to medial, as in:*

Nor the cause of the friendship I emit, nor the cause of the friendship I take again.³¹

(2) *Medial, as in:*

. . . I dwell not on soldier's pride or soldier's joys.³²

(3) *Medial to final, as in:*

Memories of old in abeyance, love and faith in abeyance.³³

may be readily approximated in librettos, as, for example, instances of initial repetition in

(1) O, woe is me, that thou whom I adored . . .

O, woe is me, that you I thought. . . .³⁴

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Sec. 11.

²⁷ *Lucia de Lammermoor*, p. 10.

²⁸ "Reiterative Devices in *Leaves of Grass*," *American Literature*, I (May, 1929), 166.

²⁹ "Song of Myself," Sec. 24.

³⁰ "The Wound Dresser."

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³³ "Virginia—the West."

³⁴ Giuseppe Verdi, *Ernani*, as represented at the Astor Place Italian Opera House (New York, 1847), Part I, scene 9.

- (2) Without him, thy noble power would degenerate into tyranny;
Without him, all the joys of love would but prove the occasion of sorrow.³⁵

or as instances of repetition within the line in

- (1) To the old man there remains his sword and shield;
Vengeance or death will show his sword and shield are left him not in vain.³⁶
- (2) Let us depart and conceal ourselves amid the shades of silence and mystery,
Let us go in silence and in mystery, that the bidding may be fulfilled.³⁷

Likewise Gay W. Allen's classification of the four types of parallelism employed in the *Leaves*,³⁸ justifiably compared to the style of the Old Testament, may be found in these librettos, the translations of which were done more often than not in the style of the Bible.

- (1) *Synonymous—the second line enforces the first by repeating the thought:*

How solemn they look there, stretch'd and still,
How quiet they look there, the little children in their cradles.³⁹

On the wings of the zephyr my ardent sighs will reach you;
In the roar of the waves you will hear the echo of my sighs.⁴⁰

- (2) *Antithetical—the second line denies or contrasts the first:*

A woman waits for me, she contains all, nothing is lacking,
Yet all were lacking, if sex were lacking. . . .⁴¹

O love! disperse the storm that has been the cause of all my woes;
Upon thy pinions let hope be wafted to me.⁴²

- (3) *Synthetic or cumulative—the second line, or several consecutive lines, supplements or completes the first:*

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.⁴³

Ah, if I could but see my beloved, it would be happiness indeed!
No more anguish of mind then—no more palpitations of my heart;
The fury of my unhappy fate I should no longer fear.⁴⁴

- (4) *Climactic or ascending rhythm—each succeeding line adds to its predecessor, usually taking up words from it and completing it:*

When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd,
And the great star early droop'd in the western sky in the night,
I mourn'd, and yet shall mourn with ever-returning spring,
Ever-returning spring, trinity sure to me you bring,
Lilacs blooming perennial, and drooping star in the west
And thought of him I love.⁴⁵

What sounds! what solemn prayer fills this area of sorrow?
It stops my breath—it penetrates my whole being,

³⁵ G. Rossini, *Otello* (New York, 1849), Act I, scene 6.

³⁶ *Ernani*, Part I, scene 9.

³⁷ Verdi, *Il Trovatore* (New York: Academy of Music, 18—), Act II, scene 3.

³⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 222.

³⁹ "The Sleepers," Sec. 1.

⁴⁰ *Lucia di Lammermoor* (New York: John Douglas, c. 1847), Act I, scene 5.

⁴¹ "A Woman Waits for Me."

⁴² "Song of Myself," Sec. 1.

⁴³ *Otello* (1849), Act I, scene 1.

⁴⁴ *Otello* (1849), Act I, scene 3.

⁴⁵ "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," Sec. 1.

Forces from my lips deep sighs, and stays the beating of my heart,
 Ah, in this horrible tower, Death seems to stalk in strides of darkness;
 I fear—I fear those doors will only ope to bear away the corpse.⁴⁶

It should be noted that the various functions of these devices do not poetically affect the essential proselike flow of rhythm but rather help to maintain the inherent proselike motions emanating from the lines. Nevertheless, the presence of poetic qualities appears to have caused some misconception of rhythm as a whole. That the rhythm of the *Leaves* disregards meter in favor of verbal accentuation is evident to Whitman scholars, but that this same rhythm cannot be fixed is not so evident. For instance, Bradley's "pyramidal formation," in which the movement of lines, starting small, expanding, and receding again to the small, cannot serve as a standard pattern of formation for all Whitman's stanzas,⁴⁷ because it is only one of many possible rhythmic formations. Whitman's rhythm, like that of recitative, produces a variety of rhythmical patterns which take shape within the line (or in the case of recitative within the phrase) and governs the shape of the whole. Let us examine a few. A common rhythmic formation in the *Leaves* starts out small and expands:

Clear and sweet is my soul, and clear and sweet is all that is not my soul.⁴⁸

This is also common in recitative:

a fe-steg-gia-r le noz-ze il-lus-tri gia nel ca-stel-lo i no-bi-li pa-ren-ti⁴⁹

Bradley's "pyramid" is also common:

not words, not music or rhyme I want, not custom or lecture, not even the best.⁵⁰

The pyramid in recitative:

gia di noi femmine alla piu mar motta per a guzzar l'inge-gno e far la spirito
 sa tutto a untratto.⁵¹

Still another formation starts large and ends small:

The atmosphere is not a perfume, it has no taste of distillation, it is odorless.⁵²

In recitative:

ba-sta chiu-der-la a chia-ve e il col-po e fat-to!⁵³

⁴⁶ *Il Trovatore* (18—), Act IV, scene 1.

⁴⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 453.

⁴⁸ "Song of Myself," Sec. 3.

⁴⁹ *Lucia di Lammermoor* (G. Schirmer), p. 61.

⁵⁰ "Song of Myself," Sec. 5.

⁵¹ *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (G. Schirmer), p. 124.

⁵² "Song of Myself," Sec. 2.

⁵³ *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* (G. Schirmer), p. 124.

Such variety of movements leads not to symmetrical formation of line movements, which are merely one feature of Whitman's rhythm, but to the rhythm of the accents of words. The feeling of rhythmic unity therefore is to be sought, not in patterns of meter or movement itself, but in the interaction of rhythm and word.

Through this relationship of rhythm and word, the line becomes a closely knit organic unit capable of creating variable structural units. Each line is a complete unit, yet its organic nature will permit an interaction of lines which may result in a number of interrelated lines within one unit. For example, in Section 48 of "Song of Myself," the first line,

I have said that the soul is not more than the body,

is an independent unit which bears a concept that may stand alone. The next line,

And I have said that the body is not more than the soul,

is an amplification of the first statement and may also stand independently. The third line,

And nothing, not God, is greater than one's self is,

introduces a new idea that has been born of the first. The lines that follow, all beginning with the word "And," are amplifications of the concept of the third line and may be considered as one unit. But even they possess an independence of their own, for any one of them may be taken out of the text and maintain its independence.

These units are freely manipulated in the exposition of the subject. If the subject demands contrast, one unit may be placed against another; if it demands climactic summaries, unit upon unit may be compiled; if it demands a part-by-part exposition, units may be distributed piecemeal. Section 6 of "Song of Myself" will illustrate such a varied exposition. It begins in a part-by-part exposition resembling dialogue:

Part 1: A child said, *What is the grass?* fetching it to me with fat hands;
How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is anymore than he.

Part 2: I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, and of hopeful green stuff woven.

Part 3: Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord,
A scented gift and remembrancer designedly dropt,
Bearing the owner's name someway in the corners, that we may see and remark,
and say *Whose?*

Part 4: Or I guess the grass is itself a child, the produced babe of the vegetation.

Part 5: Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic,
And it means, sprouting alike in broad zones and narrow zones,
Growing among black folks as among white,
Kanuck, Tuckahoe, Congressman, I give them the same, I receive them the same.

Then follows a transitional statement,

And now it seems to me the beautiful uncut hair of graves,

which is followed by a climactic unit in which the symbol of grass is related to the process of creation and transmigration.

Tenderly will I use you curling grass,
It may be you transpire from the breasts of young men,

It may be if I had known them I would have loved them,
 It may be you are from old people, or from offspring taken soon out
 of their mothers' laps,
 And here you are the mothers' laps.
 This grass is very dark to be from the white heads of old mothers,
 Darker than the colourless beards of old men,
 Dark to come from under the faint red roofs of mouths.
 O I perceive after all so many uttering tongues,
 And I perceive they do not come from the roofs of mouths for nothing.

After this the personal note returns in a short unit:

I wish I could translate the hints about the dead young men and women,
 And the hints about old men and mothers, and the offspring taken soon
 out of their laps.

And another transition,

What do you think has become of the young and old men?
 And what do you think has become of the women and children?

prepares for the final summary in which the universal application of the subject is compactly presented.

They are alive and well somewhere,
 The smallest sprout shows there is really no death,
 And if ever there was it led forward life, and does not wait at the
 end to arrest it,
 And ceas'd the moment life appear'd.
 All goes onward and outward, nothing collapses,
 And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier.

Perceived thus, Whitman's poetry begins to assume its individual aspects quite naturally. Its methods of exposition, dictated by the subject, bring forth manifold features varying from the bit-by-bit exposition of the small units to the enumerative summaries of the large units. Its final aspect presents itself in an aggregate of independent units which reveal continuity, a relationship of parts, and a continuous motion of expansion and contraction. Rhythmic contribution is vital to this poetry. But a close examination of this rhythm will discover the underlying force enabling its free and diverse movements to be the self-sufficiency of the line, which in turn derives its force from the accents and potency of the word. The interrelation of rhythm and subject then becomes manifest and the function of rhythm fully comprehended. In reality Whitman did achieve the correlation of form and content through the interrelation of rhythm and thought, so that in effect his poetry is a rhythmical exposition of thought units.

Since the structure and function of rhythm clearly discloses its operative force, Whitman's poetry rests firmly established in a musico-poetic texture. Consequently, the structure of his poetry cannot be judged solely on the basis of poetical standards. It is futile to expect stanzaic compactness when the development of the subject requires looseness of texture.⁵⁴ It is equally futile to isolate climactic summaries

⁵⁴ R. M. Weeks, "Phrasal Prosody," *English Journal*, X (January, 1921), 16.

for the purpose of comparing them with the more symmetrical patterns of conventional poetry when these are merely parts of a poetic texture embracing a variety of patterns. It is quite erroneous to consider the lyric technique of the two poems, "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" and "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" as anomalies in Whitman's technique⁵⁵ when the intriguing manner in which rhythm creates a part lyric, part conversational, tone is simply the logical outcome of rhythmic function.

On the other hand, the musical nature of Whitman's poetry should not be misinterpreted. No doubt the close relationship between rhythm and thought invites fascinating analogies with music. A comparison of the treatment of "thematic symbols"⁵⁶ in the poem "When Lilacs Last, etc.," and the musical development of themes seems engaging until further observation of poetic texture discovers the characteristic loose exposition which gives nothing like the impression of architectonic structure of sonata form. On the same basis the analogy with opera seems even more tempting. In the poem "Song of Myself" the subject easily lends itself to five logical divisions⁵⁷ comparable to five acts of an opera, and the variety of thought units might be conceived in terms of dialogue and song. But here again comparison becomes hazardous, because it suggests the planned distribution of solo, ensemble, and recitative—types of singing requiring different principles of composition which Whitman's rhythm cannot accommodate.

As the nature and the function of rhythm plainly indicate, the relationship of music to *Leaves of Grass* lies in the resemblance of Whitman's rhythm to the semi-musical rhythm of recitative rather than to the even-measured rhythm of pure music. The connection of Whitman's rhythm with this music should be accepted; otherwise the entire individuality of his poetic style will be irrevocably lost. On the other hand, the musical character of his rhythm represents no mysteriously wrought poetic emulation of musical compositions. It is unnecessary to construct a case for Whitman's musical illiteracy or for his fine knowledge of music. It is hardly necessary to declare that "it was not opera in words that he wrote but words that moved as opera sounded to him."⁵⁸ As a sensitive poet, Whitman simply perceived his rhythmic needs worked out in the speech rhythms of the recitative and transferred some of its devices to his poetry for the practical purpose of expressing his cosmic views in a graphic style. It is not his musical but his artistic genius that commands attention.

⁵⁵ See Killis Campbell, "The Evolution of Whitman as Artist," *American Literature*, VI (1934-35), 257, and Floyd Stovall, "Main Drifts in Whitman's Poetry," *American Literature*, IV (1932), 322.

⁵⁶ Brown, *op. cit.*

⁵⁷ Carl F. Strauch, "The Structure of Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself*," *English Journal* (College ed.), XXVII (1938), 600.

⁵⁸ Henry S. Canby, *Classic Americans* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1931), p. 333.

Prescriptivism and Linguistics in English Teaching

ARCHIBALD A. HILL¹

IN A recent article in *College English*² Morton W. Bloomfield presents a cogent, informed, and admirably good-natured account of the problem involved in teaching English to native speakers of the language, now that linguistic scientists (a notably prickly group of men) have begun to question many traditional attitudes and even to deny vehemently, not always wisely but sometimes certainly with good evidence, some of the things we all learned in the classroom as gospel truth. Professor Bloomfield comes to the conclusion that what is taught in an English class must be some form of wise and moderate prescriptivism, checked by the limits of fact as established by linguistics. The reason for his position is that the teaching of English involves questions of value, which characteristically are not settled merely by the accumulation of facts.

It is probably natural that Bloomfield, as a man primarily interested in the discipline of English, though aware of linguistics, should lean in the direction of value, just as it is natural that a linguist, even though he be a practicing teacher of English, should lean in the direction of fact. I do not wish to question Bloomfield's central thesis or to add fuel to an already unfortunate blaze. Rather it seems to me possible, if a linguist states some modifications of what Bloomfield seems to believe the linguists' position to be, that the area of

mutual understanding may be increased, with benefit to all.

Bloomfield defends prescriptivism first because it has social utility. That is, the public judges, and will continue to judge, our students by the language they use. Therefore, he says, the honest teacher must neither hinder nor hurry change but teach realities; an unwise liberalism will expose students to censure. With this position the majority of responsible linguists would agree. We are to blame for not having made ourselves clear on the point, though my own experience in the failure of serious attempts at explanation leads me to believe that perhaps not all the blame lies with the linguists. No intelligent linguist would think of denying that the use of a given linguistic form will have inevitable social consequences for the user—the position that language patterns are a part of larger patterns of social behavior and that each reacts on the other is central to linguistics. In my own classes, as an example of social consequences from language use, I often tell a story told me by an old Charlestonian. She had brought a beau home for family inspection, and her father was proudly displaying his collection of art. "Now this," he said, "is called 'The Broken Pitcher.'"

"Yes," said the young man, "I see the corner's damaged." The suitor was never invited to the house again. The form "pitcher" cannot be ugly in itself—we use it as a perfectly good word. Nor can the confusion of two words, as the result of natural tendencies of change, be a very

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² October, 1953.

heinous sin. Millions probably confuse them, just as even more millions confuse *affect* and *effect*. The point, however, is not that it would be easy to defend the young man's misunderstanding. It is rather that the consequences of it were very real for him and presumably unpleasant. The nonlinguist often argues violently that there is something inherently wrong, ugly, or illogical in such a form as "pitcher" and equates any denial of the inherent "wrongness" of the form with a denial of the social consequences of using it.

The linguist maintains merely that in itself a form, say *golpet*, is as good as another form, say *thaltep*; the difference between them is merely one of attitudes, not of inherent qualities. I have chosen nonsense illustrations deliberately, in an effort to find forms to which the reader has not already learned to respond with conditioned attitudes of value. It seems to me that a linguist is performing a service in attempting to separate such conditioned value reactions from the inherent qualities of the stimulus and that we have a right to complain when our attempts to do so are received as further illustrations of the blindness of men who are supposed to believe that "anything goes."

Bloomfield's second reason for teaching a prescriptive grammar and usage is that it is an aid in understanding the past. Again a linguist cannot quarrel, at least with the aim. Yet it is to be doubted whether prescriptive grammar is always conservative. For instance, one of Bloomfield's examples of vulgate (the language of the majority) which he would rightly resist in classroom use is "I ain't got no dough." Two of the three objectionable forms in this sentence, *ain't* and the double negative, are older than the prescriptivist objection to them and are

therefore more in line with past usage than are the modern condemnations. A linguist would hope to accomplish Bloomfield's aim of understanding past language structures not by reliance on prescriptivism but by knowing the structures of the present, with adequate recognition of the fact that different forms and structures are in use in the English-speaking community, in different places, on different social levels, and for different purposes. With such a background a student would, we hope, be ready to deal with the language of the past not as a primitive jargon less perfect than his own speech but as a structure to be respected and understood—a structure different from others, as all language structures are, and, by virtue of difference, capable of artistic effects as good as any open to Hemingway or Housman.

Bloomfield's third and fourth reasons for rejecting vulgate in favor of a prescriptive norm are that vulgate is deficient in all artistic qualities except vigor and is likewise deficient in intellectual breadth and depth. The two statements are closely related and should be discussed together. In a measure, a linguist can agree. If we listen to talk heard on street corners or in grocery stores, it is true that we hear little that is memorable for beauty or intellectual penetration. Language use is an art, and all can agree that great practitioners of any art are few in number. Similarly it is a truism that intellectual leaders are anything but numerous—otherwise they would not be leaders. Yet many linguists would feel that, when Bloomfield says that vulgate is deficient in beauty and intellectual qualities, he is confusing the language with its use. We can agree with him heartily that good models of language use should be given to our students, but

we would maintain that the nature of an instrument is different from its employment.

Language structure, with which linguists are primarily concerned, remains relatively constant, and in all important ways is shared by all members of the community, both those who use the language well and those who use it ill. For instance, though it is not universally agreed to by all linguists, many would now say that English has four degrees of stress. If so, this is an example of an important structural feature shared by normal English contemporary speech on all levels and in all localities. Even if we grant that such structural characteristics can only be created by the habitual usage of the community and are further changed only as these habits change, the striking fact about such structural features is how slowly and how little they change. If English has four stresses, it has acquired the fourth at some time since the Norman Conquest; otherwise the stress system has apparently remained unchanged for approximately two thousand years. If there should be only three significant stresses in Modern English, there has been no change at all. If such structural features can remain so little changed in the face of all the social upheavals and linguistic rivalries of two millennia, it would seem that we should not worry too much over such details as where a student stresses a word like *justifiable*. At most the choice can affect the student and this particular word; the system of stress distinctions will remain the same. It should be emphasized that structure in language is something more, and more important, than a collection of items. A change in the number or type of stress distinctions would be vastly more important (for good or ill) than the introduction or the

loss of vocabulary items. I am aware, for instance, that confusion of *disinterested* and *uninterested* destroys a useful vocabulary item and one which I would have been glad to see preserved, even though nowadays I cannot talk of "disinterested judges" for fear of being misunderstood. But, though vocabulary items can be lost, others can be gained, and somehow we manage to carry on our necessary business with the vocabulary we have at any one time. Therefore, it seems to me that we need not fear that the whole of our language will be damaged by those who would say "bored, disinterested judges." For the individual and the community, structure is a broad, pervasive pattern, already determined, and capable of very little change. As such it is relatively neutral and colorless. Indeed, in large measure, it is something which escapes the user's conscious attention. The use he makes of his structure and the items within it is something different. Language use is important to the individual; he is highly conscious of it and rightly seeks advice and help in improving it.

For the reasons which I have tried to outline, when Bloomfield goes on to say that to accept the use made of our language by the majority would be to destroy the beauties of the language itself, I think it is necessary to disagree. He is here assuming that poor use is essentially the same thing as poor structure. I should rather say that the use of language is an area in which value judgments must indeed be made, and is an area in which English teachers should increase both their vigilance and their research, but that structure is different and is not subject to the same kind of criticism we would bring to bear in order to evaluate a paragraph by Winston Churchill or a sonnet by Shelley. Bloom-

field goes so far as to say that one who does not recognize the beauty of "Forever wilt thou love and she be fair" is unfit to teach English. But the example belongs to art and is beautiful because it is a part of a literary work the totality of whose beauty we all admire. It is difficult to argue that the forms contained in the line—considered either as separate items or as a special dialect—are in themselves any better or more beautiful than the forms of vulgate. For instance, if *wilt* is more beautiful than *will*, does that lead us to the conclusion that the sequence *-it* is beautiful, so that *kill* is better than *killed*? Or if a dialect employing a distinction between singular and plural in second-person pronouns is better and more logical than one which does not, are we to defend the metropolitan low-class distinction between *you* singular, and *youse* plural? I wish, however, to be as clear as possible and therefore to say as emphatically as I can that I agree that anyone who cannot appreciate the beauty of the Keats poem is unfit to teach English. And I should add further that, if there is any student who has drawn from linguistics the idea that the poem is in a strange and inferior dialect because its vocabulary and forms differ from contemporary everyday usage, he holds a horrifying and absurd conclusion. If linguistics leads to such beliefs, it earns nothing but opposition. May I hope, however, should any student of literature be led into the equally horrifying and absurd idea that the dialect employed by Keats is better than vulgate in all social and even in all artistic situations, that Bloomfield would join me in giving such a fallacious conclusion as vigorous opposition as I am sure he would give the other?

Much the same sort of objection applies to Bloomfield's fear that too much

liberalism would destroy intellectual activity. It is usual in our culture to write about intellectual matters in a very formal kind of English, which it is all too easy to identify with the intellectual activity itself. The same thing is true of other cultures, yet elsewhere in the world the disappearance or replacement of a special intellectual language or dialect has not meant the disappearance of intellectual activity. Such replacements have almost always been by the form of language originally regarded as an unintellectual vulgate. Yet, when the replacement takes place, the old vulgate quickly becomes the new intellectual language. For instance, no one would maintain that the body of intellectual writing in the vernacular tongues is inferior to that in Latin or that intellectual vigor has been circumscribed by the disuse of the scholar's language. For once, therefore, I think I am safe in denying one of Bloomfield's theses. If, by vulgate, Bloomfield means the language structure used by the majority, then I should oppose him with this statement: Good style, whether artistic or intellectual, is possible in any language structure. Mark Twain, in *Huckleberry Finn*, employed the vulgate structure of rural America in his day, yet Huck's descriptions of a village funeral and of a backwoods front parlor are among the classics of our literature. It seems to me that as teachers of English, whether with or without linguistic training, we should strive for clarity. If we assume that style and structure need no differentiation, we are in danger of obscuring both.

I have tried to equal Bloomfield's urbanity and his grasp of first things first. I may have failed, but I hope I may permit myself to believe that he as English teacher, I as linguist, might agree that all who teach the native language have a

solemn duty in understanding language, its structure, its social implications, and the use, beautiful or otherwise, which men have put it to. Further, since literature is necessarily a part of language, all

that a linguist can discover about his subject should not merely limit what the English teacher can say but is of positive though potential value to him in all his work.

A Simpler Approach to Punctuation

ELLEN JOHNSON¹

LEARNING the rules is a hard way to learn to punctuate. There are too many rules, and far too many exceptions, for ready recall and application. The experienced writer by some instinct discovers the operative principle without formulating it; but the inexperienced writer, particularly one whose talents lie in other fields, is lost in a maze of apparently meaningless conventions. What is needed for the novice is a clearer formulation of the operative principle, not a more elaborate description of the convention. It was in my effort to formulate some simple working principles that would help account for the rules and their exceptions that I stumbled upon what my students have come to call—imprecisely, perhaps, but usefully for their purpose—"this rhetorical approach to punctuation."

The writer with any experience soon discovers that the punctuation cannot be finally determined by the structure of the sentence. What is being punctuated, of course, is not the sentence but the *line* (if the page were wide enough each paragraph would be a single line). Punctuation is addressed to the reader's eye to direct the line of discourse. Seen thus, punctuating becomes a part of *the delivery* and its operative principle (as opposed to

its conventions) may be rhetorical rather than grammatical.

The names of some of the marks tend to suggest this. Long before a sixteenth-century printer began evolving our present system of marks upon the page, the "period" was a familiar term in the analysis of oratory and denoted a unit in the delivery of the discourse, a point in the statement. Styles change over the centuries, but the operative principle seems to remain that the "period" is one point in the line of discourse. Note the following passage:

Technically, she is not short a grade: she is short a course. According to the University Code, she should have repeated the course within a year if she had not already removed the condition; if there is any exception to this rule, the Registrar's office should be notified through the student's major department. If there is any appeal in this case, it should be referred to the School of Home Economics.

Here the writer has delivered five unconnected statements. Grammatically, these might have stood as five sentences. But note that had they so stood, the "point" would have been lost. As they stand now, the first sentence takes up the point of the technicality of the shortage; the second refers to the provisions of the Code; and the third takes up the point about appeal. Note that in the second sentence, particularly, two periods might have re-

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sulted in misunderstanding, for the second would have seemed to be asserted on the writer's own responsibility, whereas both are properly referred to the Code. (The writer is summarizing the facts concerning a delinquent case and leaving the decision to those in higher authority.)

In formal discourse the unit is ordinarily the declarative sentence, the sentence that completes a statement about a subject. This is the "period." It is possible for such a period to be one clearly connected, uninterrupted line of discourse. The following will serve to illustrate:

It is a fairly safe general rule that the modern writer will use as little punctuation as will enable his reader to follow the sequence of statement without retracing the line.

Such lines are frequently possible. But more often, even when the connection is clear in the wording, the discourse cannot be delivered without interruption of the sequence of statement. This brings us to our second consideration, the interruption or "comma."

The "comma" is an interruption of the sequence of statement. It is said that Eugene O'Neill considered "Comma" as a possible title for *Anna Christie*. The implication seems to be that Chris's action in the play is an interruption of the sequence of the statement of Anna's destiny as a seaman's woman. In the delivery of the discourse, also, the element which we call a "comma" interrupts the sequence of the statement. Note the following sentence:

Mr. Bradley, who is our department manager, gives good advice.

Here the sequence of statement is that Mr. Bradley gives good advice. The remark that he is our department manager is an incidental comment and does not "restrict" the statement that he gives

good advice. The relative clause is clearly connected in the wording of the sentence, but it interrupts the sequence of the statement. Therefore it is a "comma." Note that the same grammatical element is not a comma in the following sentence:

The man who is our department manager gives good advice.

Here the remark that he is our department manager *identifies* the man who gives good advice, and thus the clause is a necessary part of the sequence. There is no interruption.

So long as the wording is clearly connected, the comma may be used to mark any interruption, and it may not be necessary for the writer to recognize the various kinds. But when the wording is not connected, or when the connection is not clear, a stronger mark must be used. When an unconnected statement is to be brought within the same period, the writer must determine which of *four* marks is appropriate to the implication.

These four "stronger marks," together with the period and the comma, make up the six principal marks used in the punctuation of the discourse. The six may be briefly summarized as follows:

The "period": The period is a unit in the delivery, one point in the statement.

The "comma": The comma is an interruption of the sequence of statement when the connection is clear in the wording.

The unconnected statement within the period:

The colon ends an introductory statement when the construction continues the sense.

The semicolon balances strong co-ordinates not otherwise clear in the construction.

The dash marks a break in the construction, a shift in the statement.

The parenthesis is a comment which needs mention at the time, but which is aside from the line of discourse.

The following formula is convenient for reference in manipulating the four "strong marks" in relation to the period:

- A. B. Statements A and B are two consecutive points in the discussion.
- A: b. A is an introductory statement. The b construction continues in the sense of A to complete the point.
- A; b. A and b are co-ordinates combining to make a single point.
- A—b. Here b breaks into the construction of A and continues the statement as a prominent part of the discourse.
- A (b). Here b needs mention at the time but drops out of the line of the discourse.

Students tell me that at first they rely upon this formula for reference. They tell me that in proofreading they first reread the line to be sure that they have brought out the connection. They check the periods to be sure that they have brought out the points in progression. They test the commas to be sure that the sequence is clear. Where the wording loses connection they supply it, or else consider which of the four "strong marks"—"introduction, balance, break, or drop"—will convey the meaning.

It is wise at this point to remark that our present trend is toward "open" rather than "close" punctuation. It is a fairly safe general rule that the modern writer will use as little punctuation as will enable his reader to follow the sequence of statement without retracing the line. The connection will be clear in the wording. In "scientific prose" particularly, the writer wishes to communicate to the reader's *understanding*, and he will not leave to implication what can readily be made explicit. His writing will give the illusion of fluent conversation, and he will time his points to his reader's

grasp. He will use the "strong marks" sparingly. Nevertheless, they are frequently necessary; and the writer of mature prose must know when to use them with discretion.

In presenting this approach to a class I first, in an early session, explain the six marks and illustrate their use, elaborating no more than will make their functions theoretically clear. Complications come with practice and are dealt with as they arise. There is never any *systematic* elaboration. It is always a question of adapting a simple principle to the requirements of a given case.

Since my first concern is to establish the sense of *period*, to shift the attention from sentence to *line*, from grammar to rhetoric, from conventional rule to communicative function, I like to begin by playing with the possibilities of relating two statements in context:

The statements may be two consecutive points in the progress of the discussion:

Punctuation is like an engine. It pulls the whole train.

They may be connected in wording to form a single statement:

Punctuation is like an engine, for it pulls the whole train.

Perhaps the first introduces the second to explain the first:

Punctuation is like an engine: it pulls the whole train.

Perhaps the statements are of equal rank in forming a single point:

Punctuation is like an engine; it pulls the whole train.

Perhaps the second breaks into the first to give the second greater prominence:

Punctuation is like an engine—it pulls the whole train.

Perhaps the second needs mention at the time but is not a point in the discussion:

Punctuation is like an engine (it pulls the whole train).

This fall I have a class of "average" freshmen. In our first full hour devoted to punctuation I placed on the board again the formula I had previously mentioned. The students asked me to illustrate how it worked. I wrote the two statements in the form of a "comma fault":

Punctuation is like an engine, it pulls the whole train.

The class recognized the break in connection (the voice will usually catch it), and we discussed the possibilities of correction. We pretended that the statements were the lead line of a paragraph, and the students spent a lively twenty minutes suggesting the statements that might follow to justify the varying permissible punctuations. When we had finished, one of my weakest mechanics exclaimed, "Why, it means whatever the writer wants it to mean, and his reader gets whatever he puts down!" I felt that our point had been made.

There was plenty of time left in the hour for me to present the mimeographed material I had prepared. This exercise follows, with my treatment in parentheses.

THE COMMA: INTERRUPTION OF SEQUENCE

I

A. Note:

It is a fairly safe general rule that the modern writer will use as little punctuation as will enable his reader to follow the sequence of the statement without retracing the line.

(We considered the content as well as the form of this statement.)

B. Compare:

1. Sequence and interruption:

- a) Mr. Bradley, who is our department manager, gives good advice.
(The incidental comment does not restrict the statement that Mr. Bradley gives good advice. The comment is an "interruption.")

- b) The man who is our department manager gives good advice.

(Here the same grammatical construction *identifies* the man who gives good advice. This is one "sequence.")

2. Number of members in series:

- a) Invitations were sent to George, Sue and Jim, Sally, Mary, Betty and John.
(Five invitations were sent.)

- b) Invitations were sent to George, Sue and Jim, Sally, Mary, Betty, and John.

(Six invitations were sent. The comma makes all the difference.)

II

A. Justify or correct:

1. All plants producing a product, dependent upon a previous product, are caused to suffer.

(This shows a "false interruption.")

2. One of the first differences you find, is that the campus is spread over quite a large area.

(Here there is a "cut sequence.")

3. As you can see from the last statement I missed what I believe to be one of the biggest things in today's modern living.

(Here one may read a "false sequence" and have to retrace the line.)

4. One student who has chemistry at the Federal Works Administration quonsets at eight o'clock on Tuesday and Thursday mornings must go to the agricultural campus for his nine o'clock class.

(Here the reader needs the interruption marked to pick up the sequence.)

5. If you don't like to read a lot read a little every day. It soon will become a lot.

(Here the interruption would emphasize the point, particularly since there is a shift of "mode" in the statement.)

- B. (A set of similar examples was assigned as an exercise.)

Judging by my past classes, I think we shall proceed to the correction of comma faults from the themes. The "comma fault" sentence is ordinarily a proper period in oral delivery. The student has not learned that the implied connection communicated by the voice does not appear in the writing. We shall discuss the

possibilities of more explicit connection—or of the manipulation of the “stronger marks” of the discourse.

As the student matures as a writer and develops a longer period with more unconnected statement, we shall discuss the possibilities of untangling the “snags” in his line. One example may suffice to show what we may do.

A student writes:

I like the double-barreled shotgun because: it is simpler in construction, it is a more versatile gun for upland game shooting, and it is built for years of use and abuse.

Here the colon does not end a statement. We might omit “because”:

I like the double-barreled shotgun: it is simpler in construction, it is a more versatile gun for upland game shooting, and it is built for years of use and abuse.

Perhaps the writer should have strengthened the parallelism of the structure:

I like the double-barreled shotgun because it is simpler in construction, because it is a more versatile gun for upland game shooting, and because it is built for years of use and abuse.

If the writer really wanted the force of the colon, perhaps he should have made a more formal introductory statement. He might also have strengthened the coordinates by using semicolons:

I like the double-barreled shotgun for the following reasons: it is simpler in construction; it is a more versatile gun for upland game shooting; and it is built for years of use and abuse.

But perhaps the writer meant to point the enumeration rather than the introduction, in which case he might have done this pointing parenthetically:

I like the double-barreled shotgun because (a) it is simpler in construction, (b) it is a more versatile gun for upland game shooting, and (c) it is built for years of use and abuse.

If it was the series he meant to emphasize, the writer might have presented

this first and broken off the construction to summarize:

It is simpler in construction, it is a more versatile gun for upland game shooting, it is built for years of use and abuse—for these reasons I like the double-barreled shotgun.

Presumably the writer intended a single period, but it is even possible that the statements might be related as consecutive points in a line of development:

The double-barreled shotgun is simpler in construction. It is a more versatile gun for upland game shooting. It is built for years of use and abuse. Therefore I like it.

There are other possibilities, but these should suffice to illustrate the manipulation of the six principal marks.

As the themes come in, I make it a point to record on cards reasonably fluent passages which are either (a) conspicuously effective or (b) conspicuously “snagged” by error or ambiguity. As time permits, the students write these passages on the board and we discuss them. The effective ones we commend, and point out how the principle is illustrated. The faulty ones we discuss, and show how the uncertainty of convention results in loss of communication.

Our slogan for the writer is “Say what you mean—in the reader’s language.” If the writing is “correct” but does not convey the writer’s meaning, the reader will never know, and the communication will be lost; but an error, or an unintended ambiguity, may be evidence of a discrepancy between what the writer means and what he says. The error in convention may indicate an implied meaning imperfectly conveyed. The editor cannot always be sure of an “unauthorized” correction. Consequently we like to have the author present as judge of the court of appeal. Sometimes the author himself

cannot, on the spur of the moment, explain the discrepancy or supply the answer. Should we marvel too much? It is said that Cardinal Newman once spent three years on a single sentence.

It is not my purpose in this article to present an exhaustive treatise on teaching punctuation. I simply want to suggest an *approach*—through communicative rather than conventional principle. I propose that we begin *in medias res*, where the punctuation comes most prominently into the student's experience in writing. I suggest that we shift the emphasis from the sentence to the *line*. And I think we should start by clearing up the student's confusion about "optional" punctuation.

A handbook may have nineteen rules for the comma, with exceptions under most of them—and a residue of "optional" commas unclassified. This is too much for the novice. One student complained: "I wouldn't mind learning the rules, if it weren't for all the exceptions—and what does 'optional' mean? Does that mean it doesn't make any difference what we do?"

Of course it makes a difference. The writer must say *what he means*—in the *reader's language*. We may apply the Coleridgean dictum that the test of a blameless style is its untranslatableness into other words [or signs] of the same language without loss of meaning.

I wish to stress the importance of making up the exercises from the current themes. For one thing, the error patterns change over the years (perhaps as teachers tend to eradicate the prevailing errors of their own generation), and it seems

foolish to knock down straw men when so many live demons are active. Furthermore, there is a tremendous difference in motivation when we work on the current writing. The class recognizes that its best writer might make an error the weakest could correct. Consequently the problem of correction becomes a co-operative exercise. I find invariably that a student is pleased to discover one of his own "snags" brought up for class attention, and is likely to volunteer the information that he was the culprit.

Since using "this rhetorical approach to punctuation" I have noticed a conspicuous improvement in the general coherence and fluency of the writing. This seems to me to be a natural consequence: A sense of structure is not enough, for structure is static; the dynamics of the writing is in the *movement* of the line. Only by sensing this movement does the writer achieve coherence and fluency and ease of expression. The punctuation does not stop: it *points*—in the direction of the movement. As the student proofreads to mark his point, he picks up the irrelevance in his statement.

It is my conviction that my students are becoming better readers (certainly better proofreaders). The average person is less a reader than a scanner: he reads to look for something—perhaps information; or points he can use; or reassurance that others are in harmony with himself; or points he can pick up to disagree with. It is the rare reader who reads with attention to *the point of the writer's statement*. It is my belief that an understanding of punctuation may make one a better reader and consequently a better writer. One cannot mark a point before he sees one.

Symposium: Responsibility for Literacy

Last spring, the editors of College English invited its readers to contribute their opinions on several controversial topics related to the teaching of English. One of those suggested as needing open discussion was "Should the college take responsibility for making literate those students who are not literate at matriculation?" Varied answers to this question are presented in the symposium which follows.

I

You ask, "Should the college take the responsibility for making literate those students who are not literate at matriculation?" The answer, it seems to me, depends upon the college, the situation, the students, and the definition of "literate."

In a state where students have ample opportunity to attend good grade and high schools, there seems little reason for the college to spend its resources doing what should have been done before the students matriculated. But what of a college in a state where many schools are limited to less than the usual nine months and where many teachers are poorly prepared? Such a state must bear its share of responsibility for the illiteracy of its students. And through what agency can these illiterate students be helped unless the college or university where they matriculate helps them? If this college or university is itself a state institution, its clear duty is, it seems to me, to make its freshmen literate.

Not all illiterate students are unintelligent. Rural students, especially, often come from nonverbal backgrounds. They have been exposed neither to books and magazines nor, though they may know words that town and city students do not, to the vocabulary of the academic world. If illiterate but intelligent stu-

dents are given help, they can succeed. I have known of freshmen placed in remedial classes who, when they became seniors, received honors. And I have known many who became acceptable students. Certainly intelligent students who are illiterate because of lack of opportunity or environment deserve at least the chance to become literate. (If, then, they do not become literate, they should not be kept in college.)

One literal definition of "literate" is *able to read and write*. But able to read what—comic books, the *Reader's Digest*, or Plato? And for what purpose—recreation, information, or growth of mind and spirit? Or all of these? Almost all students, even the superior ones, can be helped to become both better readers and better writers, to become more literate, if you will. Indeed, there is a case for including the whole student body in a literacy program. Perhaps I have now shifted the emphasis, if not the meaning, of "literate" in your question.

Even so, one argument remains for doing what we can for students not literate when they matriculate. Certainly society is served if we save those among these illiterates who are capable of becoming first literate and then educated.

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II

Throughout his undergraduate life the student's right to pursue his studies is based on the twin foundation stones of academic and financial qualification. The freshman, for example, must not only matriculate but pay his fees. The college determines these qualifications and is free to raise or lower them at will. It establishes fees by comparing expected income from all sources with expected expenditure of all types and discovering the amount each student must be assessed if he is to receive the education the college believes it can and should provide. It establishes academic requirements by identifying the abilities a student must possess to pursue profitably the next stage in his education. Both the financial and the academic requirements may vary from year to year in deference to changing social, economic, and intellectual conditions. Nonetheless, in any given year the college says in effect: "These are our requirements, academic and financial. Attain the former, and, in our opinion, you can benefit from our instruction. Pay the latter, and we will be able to provide the instruction you need."

In theory, no student could matriculate without being "literate," since inability to read and write to the standard expected of a college student would render the student unfit to pursue his studies with profit. The existence of this symposium is evidence that practice and theory do not coincide. It is easy to account for the discrepancy—the imperfect nature of examinations, the involvement of the state or provincial department of education in the matriculation arrangements, the personal equation—but such matters are beyond the present subject. However, though the causes are irrelevant, the effect is not; there are illiterate

matriculants. The illiterate matriculant may be a contradiction in terms, but he is a reality nonetheless.

So long as the college controls its admission standards and so long as it encourages matriculants to pay good money for the privilege of undertaking college instruction, it has, I firmly believe, a moral obligation to satisfy itself that every freshman is in a position to benefit from his normal studies. Since the illiterate matriculant is clearly in no such position, the college's immediate responsibility is to test the actual literacy of its matriculants. If illiterates are discovered, the college has two morally acceptable courses before it. The first alternative, highly embarrassing, since it openly declares the inadequacy of the official admission requirements, is to explain the unfortunate situation to the student, dismiss him from the college, and refund fees which have been accepted under false pretenses. The second alternative, costly but honorable, is to help the student overcome his illiteracy.

No instructor—and no college—can make a student literate; that is an undertaking which only the student himself can perform. But the instructor—and the college—can provide the opportunity for the student to become literate. Making clear the nature and extent of his deficiencies is an important first step, particularly as the matriculant may be pardoned for guilelessly assuming his position to be sound. And there are ways to tackle the deficiencies themselves—classroom drill, correction of essays, provision of tests, etc.—each in the final analysis effective or ineffective to the extent that it assists the student to help himself.

The college, then, is not responsible for making the illiterate matriculant literate; that is to ask the impossible. The college's responsibility is limited to iden-

tifying the illiterate matriculant and offering him aid in overcoming his weaknesses. These are moral responsibilities, for the college itself is responsible for the presence of illiterates in its classrooms.

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III

In my opinion, yes. The word "literate" has shades of meaning from "ability to read and write" to "being learned in literature." Our success will doubtless be marked with equal shading, depending to some extent on our ability to inspire the plodder and to a still greater extent on our capacity for endless work despite few signs of progress.

Some few will come with a high degree of literacy—those who have been well taught, those in whose homes good books and magazines are read and discussed, and very occasionally one who is a near-genius, who has learned and will continue to learn in spite of us. Although these literate ones will be in the minority, they are the ones we shall pin our hopes on for making our departments shine. We are proud of them but can take little credit for them.

On the other hand, we will draw a large body of plodders who are in our classes only because English is required. They are often listless, indifferent, stumbling. They have never read any humor above the so-called "comics" or any adventure higher than Tarzan. Their idea of a good movie is a western melodrama. They never voluntarily write anything beyond the weekly letter home. They groan in agony when a theme is assigned.

They are, however, children of taxpayers; and, if we teach in tax-supported colleges, their families pay our salaries. We owe them a debt. We may complain

that they are not college "material" or that they should go to trade schools or take a job at physical labor. The fact remains that, if they did not come in such large numbers, most of us would have to find other work.

Making them want to read and enabling them to understand what they read are challenges that only the zealous teacher can meet. As for writing, they will be self-conscious and stumbling for a long time. Our problem is to set their minds to working. Once they have formulated an idea, they have little reluctance in setting it down.

Their ideas for the most part will be about things connected with getting a living and getting along with family and friends. They can be taught to organize these ideas and to write them in straightforward English, with decent idiom, usually correct spelling, and punctuation which, if not standard, at least does not interfere with the thought.

They will never read Plato or Spenser or even Shakespeare after they leave college; but they will, if we have done our work well, have a degree of literacy entirely adequate to their needs and also to their own satisfaction. They will achieve even these proficiencies not by our attempts to make literary artists or critics of them but as a result of our persuading them to read and to express opinions about what they have read. We must show endless patience and encouragement to see that they organize, correct, and revise their written efforts.

It is needless to expect them to formulate any worth-while opinion about something which their own experience and vocabulary make them incapable of understanding. We must, therefore, let them begin with selections on their own level of comprehension. We can, of course, give them more difficult things

for study in class, where we are able to clear up their problems as they occur and point out literary excellences as we find them.

ELLIE TUCKER

SOUTHERN STATE COLLEGE
MAGNOLIA, ARKANSAS

IV

The college has no responsibility to make literate the illiterate freshmen admitted through its doors. It should not be made answerable for a condition which should have been corrected by high school teachers.

The standard remedial course in sub-freshman composition given for one term is the college's attempt to improve illiterates. With patience, perseverance, and industry, most of these poor students will pass the qualifying test given at the end of the term. After they are in the regular composition course, they will eventually make the same errors as they previously did; it is almost impossible to overcome bad writing habits allowed to go unchanged through grammar and high school years. Professors in other than English departments often complain of the errors repeatedly found in papers submitted to them. Invariably the writers are former members of sub-freshman English classes who have dropped back into their former bad habits.

Were all college professors to insist on well-written assignments, were they to demand good English in all their tests and examinations, the college could be held responsible for permitting illiterates in English to advance in courses leading to degrees. But professors grade tests on correct answers to the material studied during the term; they rarely lower a grade for errors in composition. The students expect their work to be judged by

their knowledge of the course and not on their writing ability. No college effectively demands its professors to insist on correctly written tests and assignments conformable to good English composition.

Because there is a steady increase of failures in placement tests among entering freshmen, something must be done to improve these students. To ascribe their faults to the high schools does not help their condition, and to hold the college accountable for them is not fair.

I think that the usual subfreshman composition course should be given to those failing to qualify in the placement tests. This course should be taught by the best of the communication and composition departments; only one course should be taught by the professor, and there should be a rotation among the staffs. In providing the usual pre-freshman composition course to be taught by the best of communication and composition staffs, the college has fulfilled its duty. It should not be held accountable for the illiterates failing to become literate.

Often I have thought that the effort to improve illiterates is a hardship on the English staff. Occasionally a professor will be found who does not object to remedial composition, but he is rare; it is difficult to find teachers with Job-like patience who can bear the monotonous drill required to improve poor students; and no teacher relishes being burdened for years with subfreshman composition. Although I grant that something must be done by the college to improve the poor English student, I feel that the college should not consider itself responsible for either the lack of partial success or the total failure in improving illiterates.

REV. FERDINAND J. WARD, C.M.

DE PAUL UNIVERSITY
CHICAGO

V

I do not see how the college can sidestep the responsibility to attempt to make literate those students who are not literate at matriculation. Competence in reading and writing is indispensable for the success of the college student in any course. If he has not learned to read and to write intelligently before he arrives in college, and he is worthy of being in college, he must be taught; otherwise at best he can only limp sadly through to an ignominious graduation. Having accepted the student, the college is morally obligated to do everything it can to help equip him to join "the society of educated men and women." It would be desirable, of course, if he could be equipped with a knowledge of the basic nature of language, grammar and mechanics, and sentence structure in secondary school, and possibly that is all that can be expected in those years; if he has not, however, the student, made aware of the value of such knowledge, can learn the rudiments of standard usage in a few weeks.

But to be literate involves more than the simple ability to read and to write "correctly." It involves logical thinking, an enlightened sense of discrimination, and precise choice of diction. To comprehend language in context, to analyze, to understand complex discussion and to be able to express one's ideas in simple, direct, coherent, and effective language is to be literate. The whole process of becoming educated is one of becoming more literate; it is a process of maturing and expanding comprehension. Those students who, to quote one of my diamonds in the rough, "foul up the English language" are usually incoherent, fuzzy thinkers, inadequately informed and unable systematically to arrange or order the facts and ideas which they do

comprehend. To read words is not to be literate.

A bright roommate of one of my students came to me for help in preparing a paper on a subject growing out of the reading of *Middletown in Transition*. A few blunt, leading questions revealed that he had only a vague notion of what the book was about. We sat down together and read through the first four chapters, stopping to note the specific topic ideas in paragraphs, passages, and chapters. The student was led to make an oral précis as we went along. As he began to see the basic ideas in the discussion, he began to react, and soon he had a subject for his paper.

Much poor writing results from poor reading habits. I think that I am safe in saying that not only in humanities courses but in all courses at M.I.T. instructors recognize the necessity and their responsibility to train students to handle skilfully the language of the course. M.I.T., moreover, has attempted to improve the reading skills of students by providing a reading clinic supervised by expert instructors trained in reading techniques.

Colleges could more efficiently and effectively educate students if students upon matriculation were able to use language with clarity and correctness and to read with comprehension. Most secondary-school teachers want to prepare their students to handle college courses successfully; they are not always fully informed, however, about what the college expects of the student. Unfortunately, many secondary schools, still using the mechanical, exercise system of teaching composition, produce students who can spot in isolated sentences and exercises faults in grammar and logic which they will use and fail to recognize in their own compositions. They will often regard "English" as drill unrelated to their

daily needs in communication. Colleges could help themselves, and secondary-school teachers, by engaging in programs similar to the one at the University of Kansas in which I once participated as a member of a committee which worked with Kansas secondary English teachers by reviewing their course plans and specific assignments and by reading sample student papers and writing commentaries upon them so that the secondary-school teachers would become familiar with the reading and writing skills which their students would be called upon to use when they matriculated at the university. Other colleges have conducted similar programs, and the recent report *General Education in School and College* (Cambridge, 1952) describes a study of the same problem by three preparatory schools, Andover, Exeter, and Lawrenceville, in co-operation with three universities, Harvard, Princeton, and Yale.

STERG O'DELL

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE
OF TECHNOLOGY

VI

Basically it's a moral issue. Here they are—roughly a fourth of our incoming freshmen—unable to read rapidly or well, unable to write, and often with an adolescent-sized chip on their shoulders toward English and English teachers. Shall we accept the responsibility for making them literate? Or cast them out?

Individual students plead their cases. Joan, a slow reader who is deeply troubled about world affairs. Walter, growing fast, conscientious but overburdened, napping despite himself. Andrew, his deficiencies melting away in the warmth of his drive to succeed. Jack, mature and deliberate, eager to deal with general truths, starkly unable to achieve

coherence. Dan, who writes with ungrammatical gusto of what must have been one of his outstanding successes in high school, giving a teacher a "hotfoot."

They're individuals, for one thing. For another, they're valuable. Talk with their mothers and fathers, especially when the children are younger. "He never learned to read; he'll probably never get through college," says a father sadly, speaking of his son in high school. "Maude [a third-grader] had homework assigned, but before coming inside the house she'd hide her workbook under the welcome mat." Ask these parents if their children are worth helping. They'll have an answer. They love their children.

So far as we possess the resources, it is definitely our responsibility to teach the illiterates. Their illiteracy is the fault of their—our—society as much as it is their own.

Usually these students lack insight—as does our society—into the reasons for learning effective communication skills. Our civilization emphasizes material values. Skill in making things or money wins the laurel, skill in language gets the berries. If a frugal teacher says "isn't" where a bountiful parent says "ain't," which prefer? If the teacher assigns *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and a friend requests help building a hot-rod, which? And if the classroom provides hour after hour of dull sitting instead of the vigorous activity growing minds and bodies desire, why study? Perhaps the rebels are the wise ones!

Students can hardly be blamed for drinking deep of the culture which surrounds them. That culture has failed to understand its own deepest need, the nurturing of human fellowship, co-operation, and love. It has perceived only dimly the vital role of communication in developing satisfactory relationships not

only between man and man but between man and the material universe in which he lives. The teacher's task is a broad one.

Retarded students need praise rather than censure, emotional understanding rather than needle-sharp red-penciling. They need to learn, through enjoyable practice, the basic purposes of communication: to inform, persuade, entertain. They need to tackle problems of group concern and make individual contributions, both oral and written, toward their solution. One of their chief problems, for example, if they want a college education, is that of passing enough courses to

remain in school. Probably two-thirds or more of them might ordinarily fail to graduate. What can the students suggest to solve this problem? What is the relationship between effective communication and academic success?

Teaching these young people isn't hard. If they discover that they want and need to learn, they'll do most of the job themselves. And if they find that they don't *want* to stay in college—how much better to make a dignified withdrawal rather than be flunked out!

LOUIS R. WARD

PURDUE UNIVERSITY

What Do You Think?

The May issue of *College English* will carry a second symposium on the question: "Should controversial subjects—for example, communism—be discussed either in literature or in communication classes?"

Next fall *College English* will publish reader symposiums on the questions listed below. We invite our readers to contribute statements of *not more than 600 words* on any of these:

1. What should we do about individual differences among our students at the college level?
2. When should the teacher of literature lecture? When allow or provoke discussion?
3. What are the relative merits of extensive versus intensive reading of literature?
4. Should the college teacher try to raise student taste in movie, radio, and television?

We also invite you to propose other problems you would like discussed. Send your contribution *before August 1*, if possible.

Round Table

STRUCTURAL GRAMMAR IN ENGLISH 101

Students can learn the conventional "parts of speech"—there's no doubt about that. But, curiously, they apparently have to learn them all over again in each succeeding year, in a grimly cyclical "introduction to the minimum of grammar." Suspecting, as do many teachers, that the "parts of speech" are learned only to be soon for-

TABLE 1

MEAN NUMBER OF MISCLASSIFICATIONS OF CONVENTIONAL PARTS OF SPEECH MADE FROM THE SAME SAMPLE OF PROSE

Parts of Speech	April 25	May 16	June 4
Nouns and pronouns...	3.1	0.5	2.2
Adjectives.....	4.5	0.9	3.8
Adverbs.....	0.8	0.4	0.5
Verbs.....	2.6	0.6	0.8
Prepositions.....	1.8	0.3	0.5
Conjunctions.....	2.3	0.7	3.3
Mean total of misclassifications.....	15.1	3.4	11.1

gotten, I asked sixty-eight freshmen at the Maryland State Teachers College of Salisbury to classify functionally the "parts of speech" in a sample of informal printed English. The same test was given on three dates, under nearly similar conditions. (Space forbids giving a detailed account of the testing conditions, but I invite anyone interested to write me for a fuller description.) In the first, after a week's introduction to the "parts of speech," students misclassified 15.1 per cent of the words examined. Twenty-one days later, after more intensive study, they misclassified 3.4 per cent; but, less than three weeks later, after a survey of syntax, they misclassified 11.1 per cent of the same words. In other words, skill gained in three weeks was largely lost in less than that time. The results in more detail are given in Table

1. It looks as if some skill in applying the core of the vocabulary of conventional grammar was gained. But: *This new-found skill was lost in less than three weeks.* Since I refuse to believe that my students are dunderheads, I must conclude that the "parts of speech" concepts are hardly adhesive.

The descriptive linguists long ago gave them up as a bad job. For, when they looked behind these definitions to discover the assumptions on which they rested, they found that nouns and verbs were defined (circularly, "a noun is a name") by meaning—but that no one could define meaning in any terms but the intuitive, which is a poor substitute for a scientific description which aims at elegant economy. And, when the linguists looked at the definitions of some other parts of speech, they found that the principle of definition had abruptly changed; function was now the criterion. Whereupon the linguists discarded conventional definitions of the parts of speech but supplied no workable alternative for teachers of English.

Until March, 1952. Then one linguist, Charles Carpenter Fries, offered an alternative scheme of grammatical classification in *The Structure of English* (New York: Harcourt, Brace). Some local teachers who have seen this book have said, in effect, "This seems like a really seminal approach—too bad that only graduate students can use it."

I believed, though, that undergraduates could use the classification scheme of structural grammar and exposed seventy-odd freshmen to the Fries doctrines. These students first transcribed samples of formal and informal printed English from current periodicals, passages totaling about thirteen hundred words per student. Then, supplied with test sentences, they classified the form words—the rough equivalents of substan-

tives, verbs, descriptive adjectives, adverbs—all the words which occur in inflected forms. Finally, supplied with test sentences for the leftover words, they classified the function words. After an hour of practice, they discovered that they could make these linguistic classifications as fast

then there is a practical alternative for teachers who are annoyed at the cumbersome illogicalities of conventional grammar. In structural grammar I think we will find a tool which will turn English grammar out of the rut of scholastic ritual and see it become a means for gaining insight into hu-

TABLE 2
MEAN NUMBER OF MISCLASSIFICATIONS OF FRIES FORM—CLASSES AND FUNCTIONAL WORDS—AND OF CONVENTIONAL PARTS OF SPEECH

Class or Group	Mean No. of Misclassifications According to Fries's Criteria	Part of Speech	Mean No. of Misclassifications According to Criteria of Conventional Grammar
Class 1.....	0.6	Nouns and pronouns...	1.9
Class 3, Group A.....	1.7	Adjectives.....	3.1
Class 4, Group D.....	0.6	Adverbs.....	0.6
Class 2, Groups B and G	2.4	Verbs.....	1.3
Group F.....	1.0	Prepositions.....	0.9
Groups E, I, J.....	0.1	Conjunctions.....	2.1
Mean total.....	6.4	Mean total.....	9.9
Mean score.....	93.6	Mean score.....	90.1
No. of words corrected	6,800	No. of words corrected	20,400

as they could jot down the nineteen signs involved.

Random hundred-word passages were checked for accuracy of classification, and it was discovered that the mean percentages of words misclassified was only 6.4 per cent (Table 2). It seems to me that *these students found no special difficulty in using the Fries criteria* for classification of the parts of speech. In fact, using his linguistic criteria, they averaged nearly 4 per cent fewer misclassifications.

I offer these figures as a strong suggestion that the Fries grammar is definitely usable by undergraduate students of composition—in a word, that the New Grammar can be taught in a hurry by a nonlinguist to students of composition—and that these students can learn and apply it.

If my twin hypotheses are sound—that conventional grammar is pedagogically faulty but that structural grammar is usable in the ordinary college classroom—

man communication. And then perhaps English grammar will begin to make sense to students.

MACCURDY BURNET

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

THE USE OF PATTERN IN TEACHING COMPOSITION

The members of the freshman class in college composition were listening to one of their number playing her violin. She was playing the melodies from Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*. On the blackboard before the students was an outline of the symphony, indicating the theme of each movement and showing their interrelation and the key that bound them all together. By playing these themes and calling attention to their relationship and repetition, she laid clearly before the class the closely organized pattern of the symphony. The students saw the design, the unity, of the whole. They

understood that the composer had a main thesis which he developed consistently by means of the interweaving of the various melodies.

What was all this doing in a class of composition writing? Well, I hoped that my students were learning the first principle of literary composition, or of any art or craft, namely, that an idea that is to be communicated must be put into some sort of pattern which the reader, the onlooker, the listener, can grasp; that a pattern or design is the net in which the idea is caught and held. I had had some years of more or less painful experience trying to teach students to write by giving them rules of grammar, of punctuation, of sentence structure, and all mechanical forms, when I came to the idea of beginning at the other end, with the finished piece. I am now trying to show my beginners that any piece of composition must have a design of pattern, which must be planned before the work is begun. And I do this by leading them to see the design in various literary compositions, and also in music, in pictures, and in pieces of art or craft. By taking pleasure in the symmetry and unity of a symphony, a sonnet, a picture, a vase, or a chair, the students grasp the relationship between a clear-cut design and the conveying of an idea. And it follows that they then see that their own ideas must be organized before they can be passed over from the writer to the reader.

The good fortune of having a musician in my class gave me the opportunity to use the pattern of a piece of music for a demonstration. At another time I had a young man interested in drawing, who used in his comments on the themes of other students the terms which belong to the criticism of pictures. He wrote that in one paper "just as in some drawings, the general mass was subordinated to the details." Concerning a clearly organized theme, he remarked that it was "simple, straightforward, and without artifice." At another time a girl who was taking a course in sculpture wrote a description of a Cambodian sandstone head which she had viewed at the local art museum, and she applied the qualities that she admired in the

piece of carving to the organization of her theme. She wrote: "The sculpture is made to occupy a definite space. It has simplicity, beauty of line, symmetry plus force. It exhibits a miraculous concentration of energy." And she concluded: "The Cambodian head expresses so well an idea, not only of the individual sculptor, but of a large group of his contemporaries, that the idea and the emotion are understandable by us today, even without full knowledge of the history, conditions, and culture of the times."

Another student, having read both *The Harbor* by Ernest Poole and Eugene O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*, wrote that the latter handled the same problem as the former but made his point much more quickly and easily by reason of his careful and tight organization. He wrote: "O'Neill, in a small fraction of the number of words employed by Poole, presented not only the problem of, but also the answer to, one of *The Harbor's* most vital questions." The students learned more about the power and the beauty of clear design by reading various sonnets, Wordsworth's *Michael*, Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native*, and even Aesop's fables.

From all this study the young writers began to understand that what makes us comprehend and take pleasure in a piece of art or craft is our ability to see its design. Not until we see the patterns in art or in nature do we enjoy the forward movement of a symphony or the march of Orion across the winter sky. Since, then, it is the pattern which gives pleasure and comprehension, the first duty of a writer to the reader is to organize what he has to say into a design which will be the vehicle for the idea. Hence the stating of a clear thesis sentence and the making of an outline from this become the natural first step in the writing of a theme. The mechanics of writing, the rules of punctuation, the structure of sentences, can be taught as the need develops. And they are no longer dull, monotonous requirements when they become a part of the development of a pattern.

JANNA BURGESS

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON, SEATTLE

Letters to the Editor

To the Editors of "College English":

In the "Current English Forum" for November, 1953, Professor Harry R. Warfel demonstrates by statistical analysis that the passive construction is used in about 13 per cent of the verb situations in six pages of the *New York Times* and forty-two pages of *Time* magazine. He then gives examples to prove that the construction is used very sensibly and effectively. As far as I am concerned, he completely proves his point. The only puzzling thing is that he seems to be defending the passive construction from me.

He says, in part:

In the following passage about "the cautious passive" L. M. Myers (*American English: A Twentieth Century Grammar*, pp. 170-71) employs the passive voice while reprehending it: "The frequency of the passive construction in military and bureaucratic correspondence is caused partly by official policies of impersonality, but owes something also to the fact that passive statements can be made without indicating exactly who is responsible. The passing of the buck is thereby greatly facilitated."

Once again Professor Warfel is certainly right. I did use the passive while reprehending, and perhaps I was naïve in assuming that most readers would recognize that I was doing it deliberately. But I do not think that Professor Warfel gives an entirely accurate picture of what I was reprehending. My treatment of the passive construction on pages 170-71, to which he refers, begins as follows (*italics new*):

The passive construction represents the subject as the receiver rather than the performer of an action. *It is therefore particularly appropriate when the performer is unknown, vague, or comparatively unimportant.*

Thereafter I discuss several kinds of situations in which the passive is both normal and effective, together with a few in which I think it is undesirable. One of these I call "the cautious passive"—and I still think it is amusing but not otherwise admirable. Possibly I am wrong about this, so let me attempt to make amends as follows:

It is believed that it is generally accepted that when a passage is lifted from context for the purpose of being criticized, a reasonable effort should be made to prevent its being distorted by having the part misrepresented as the whole.

L. M. MYERS

ARIZONA STATE COLLEGE AT TEMPE

To the Editors of "College English":

On January 26, 1916, Mr. Selden Smyser,¹ then head of the English department of the Yakima High School in Washington, sent questionnaires to members of the Inland Empire Council of Teachers of English, asking their help in formulating a "Statement of Minimum Accomplishments in Writing and Speaking English for High Schools in the Inland Empire." Mr. Smyser also sent questionnaires to other persons known to have dynamic ideas on written and oral English.

The most interesting response came from the late Vachel Lindsay, who wrote at length on the question, "What knowledge and habits of speaking should constitute the minimum accomplishments in oral English for Northwestern high schools?" I think the poet's answer will interest readers of *College English*. Lindsay wrote:

There is only one matter on which I have fighting convictions. Poetry should not be analyzed, dissected, or used as the basis of any kind of grind or "mental discipline." It should be chanted by the children, as individuals or in chorus [*sic*] as near to song as possible—and the chant should be varied with the meter—and the only study—should be study in bringing out the *variety* of metrical scheme and rhymes. This should be true even in Shakespeare—where he is at all musical. This system should be kept up from the first grade ward school to the last in High School—till Poetry means literally *one* thing to the child—Song.

The theology of favorite church hymns is

¹ Now professor emeritus of Central Washington College of Education. It was due largely to Professor Smyser's interest in communication that the First American College for General Semantics was held at Central Washington College in March, 1945.

not elaborately explained—at the moment of singing—neither is a lesson in music given by the pastor—nor yet a history of music. The hymn is *sung*.

An english [*sic*] class in Poetry should be a little more like a frontier revival meeting and a little less like a coroner's inquest. The deep-seated aversion to poetry of the last generation goes back to this one thing. The minute the child begins to "sing-song" the poem as he should—he is corrected by the teacher—who forces him to harden it into the most repelling prose—to ignore the rhyme and also the meter. Most poems can and should be chanted and acted after the manner of "King William was King James' son" that the children have played in the school yard for generations. There is no danger of children having proper training in prose missing the THOUGHT in any given poem—but there is every danger of their missing the music—which after all carries the real thought in solution.

These paragraphs, occupying all available space on the questionnaire sheet, were written neatly in longhand in black ink. The last five lines of the communication are crowded closely together. Lindsay had only begun. Stimulated by the question, and the personal letter Mr. Smyser had inclosed, the poet continued his comments on his own stationery.

April 20, 1916

Mr. Selden Smyser
North Yakima, Washington

MY DEAR SIR:

Thank you indeed for your letter. I answered it off hand on the enclosed scrap of paper—but find I have more to say.

I wish you would experiment in having the children chant from all their readers and English Exercises straight through from six to Eighteen years of age—and then get out graded text books with all the simple classic poems to be chanted with the varieties of time and tone indicated by notations—make it look like a music book—and the whole thing put into the hands of the music teacher.

Of course in the last years of High School this music teaching would be on the borderline of such splendid and stately reading as is given by the best actors of Shakespear—when we deal with the higher classics. I have a

deal of feeling on the subject because I have been laughed at two thirds of my life for attempting to "write poetry." Now I think I have found the bottom of the unfathomable patronage and scorn of that laugh—that came from University People and English Teachers as quickly as anyone else. They all despised poetry because they did not know it was song.

Let the poems be danced, since Dancing is coming into the schools. I have many times chanted my poems and other peoples while the crowd improvised dances. With people of any kind of instinct for dancing—it worked as well as the Victrola. And school-poems like Tennysons Bugel [*sic*] Song—The Cataract of Lodare [*sic*]—The Charge of the Light Brigade—and noble old songs like The Battle Hymn of the Republic—can be solemnly marched or rapidly danced with little preperation [*sic*]—the marchers or dancers singing softly and giving their attention to the evolutions—and a few of the best singers standing quietly and chanting or reciting or leading the song. I have done much of this during the last year—from Kintergarten [*sic*] children to big audiences. In the big audiences a few were selected to act impromptu while the audiences sang the responses after me.

A few may contend that there is much in poetry that is not conveyed by the song. Certainly, and that comes after or before—when the phrase is used as a pat quotation—or a reply in a conversation—or a plea in an extremity. Our poetry will be quoted like the scripture, once it is familiar and happy upon the tongue. The meaning of a popular song may not be at first plain to the stupid—but if he hears the catch-phrase quoted twenty times, the meaning comes. But people will not use familiarly phrases that bore them that have not sung their way into their hearts. Poetry sung today will be understood tomorrow. Poetry analyzed and tortured today will never be understood, or quoted.

Very Sincerely

NICHOLAS VACHEL LINDSAY

These documents are still in the possession of Professor Smyser and have not before been published.

H. O. LOKENSGARD

STATE TEACHERS COLLEGE
MANKATO, MINNESOTA

Current English Forum

Conducted by the NCTE COMMITTEE ON CURRENT ENGLISH USAGE¹

Q.: I sometimes hear "How are the family?" Is this correct? (J. B. L.)

A.: Quite. *Family* is a collective noun and may be thought of as a unit or as individuals. "How are the family?" expects such an answer as "We are all well" or "All right except John. He has a cold." (A. C. B.)

Q.: Recently I have heard "the data is" and "the agenda is" on the radio. Can these expressions be correct? (W. L. M.)

A.: Yes. These are examples of a general shift in agreement in English since the OE period. In the synthetic stage of our language, agreement was regularly according to form; but, since even in OE the language was growing more and more analytic, even then there were instances of agreement according to sense—just as in other IE languages. MnE has more instances of agreement according to sense, the best illustrations of which are perhaps the collective nouns. Why do we sometimes say "class is" and sometimes "class are," except that we sometimes mean one (i.e., a unit) and sometimes more than one? These collective nouns may still be either singular or plural and, for some mysterious reason, do not appear to trouble purists in the least. There are, however, a number of nouns which have shifted from regular plural agreement to regular singular agreement as their sense has shifted from plural to singular. The two nouns you mention seem to be following this second pattern.

Data ("things given") and *agenda* ("things

to be done") were originally Latin neuter plurals. The Latin plural form does not sound like an English plural, and, since most educated people today do not know Latin as all educated people did until less than a century ago, there is little or no conflict in the minds of many speakers. *Stamina*, which began in the same way, has long ceased to be anything but singular—which means only that the point has now been yielded by everybody, including conservatives and pedants. But many conservatives and perhaps all pedants are offended by "data is" or "agenda is." They no longer insist on "stamina are" or on "news are," although *news* was originally an English plural and still looks and sounds plural.

The full answer to your question, therefore, is that *data* and *agenda* are now going the way of *stamina* and *news*. Some speakers use a singular verb, others a plural verb. These items of divided usage, like all other such items, are hotly debated and given much more than their share of attention in the teaching of English. Plural agreement is still entirely acceptable; it is, for every reason, much safer in formal use, where the singular agreement could and would lead to much unprofitable argument; and it is perhaps still easier colloquially for older speakers like me—who, if we had been living a hundred years ago, would have found "news are" easier than "news is" for exactly the same reason. (A. C. B.)

Q.: One text states that the correct form in an *if*-clause is the past perfect tense when the verb in the main clause is made with the auxiliary verbs *would have* and the past participle of a verb, as in "If we had heard about the rodeo in Cheyenne on August 21, we would have planned to be there that

¹ Margaret M. Bryant, *chairman*, Harold B. Allen, Adeline C. Bartlett, Archibald A. Hill, Kemp Malone, James B. McMillan, Albert H. Marckwardt, Russell Thomas, John J. Winburne, Harlen M. Adams.

day." Could the verb in the *if*-clause ever be *would have* and a past participle? (B. M. G.)

A.: In the sample given, *would have heard* in the *if*-clause would not be idiomatic English—that is, if the subject under discussion is a condition contrary to fact, expressing past time, the type to which the sentence belongs. I have never observed any departure from these rules, even in the speech of the uneducated, except where there has been some foreign influence at work and consequently the habits of some other language have interfered with complete and easy mastery of English idiom. In the Philippines and in New York City, I have often heard the past tense used in the *if*-clause of simple contrary-to-fact conditions, expressing past time, as, for example, "If I knew you were coming, I'd have baked you a cake." (And in the same speech areas I have heard, but less often, the *would have* construction you mention.) But idiomatic English uses the past tense in the *if*-clause of contrary-to-fact conditions in present time only, as, for example, "If I knew they were coming, I would bake a cake." That is, if I knew now that they were coming, I would now bake a cake. But I don't know.

On the other hand, *would have* may certainly appear in the *if*-clause of a contrary-to-fact condition expressing past time when the idea of volition is very strong, as, for example, "If he would only have confessed his fault, his father would have forgiven it." To an English ear, this means something more than "If he had confessed . . ." and is certainly not a mere variant of that form. The first sentence (the *would have* one) conveys an idea of his stubbornness that is missing in the simple past perfect and even implies that the father, or someone else, spent some time urging confession, but in vain. *Would* is more than a tense signal here and has much of the semantic force of OE *wolde*.

Note that it is also possible to use *could have* in the *if*-clause—again with the special semantic force of *could*—as, for example, "If he could only have confessed his fault, his father would have forgiven it." The only thing I recommend as a practice is the nor-

mal form in contrary-to-fact conditions expressing past time, i.e., the past perfect tense. (A. C. B.)

Q.: What is the status of *ad* as compared to *advertisement*? (J. L. B.)

A.: In daily speech, *ad* is almost invariably preferred to *advertisement*, not only because it is shorter but also because it avoids the necessity of choosing between the two possible pronunciations of the latter, where there is a confusing duality of stress between *adver'tisement* and *advertise'ment* (divided usage).

Not only is *ad* the preferred daily idiom, but it is interesting to observe that the ordinarily conservative *New York Times* uses *ad* in almost all its copy, both for headlines and for its regular columns. The headline writer finds it much easier to incorporate a word of two letters than one of thirteen. Then again, advertising is a current field and so much in the news that metropolitan dailies devote separate columns to it.

Periodical reading matter largely molds current taste. In a study based on the *New York Times*, the *New York Herald Tribune*, a weekly called *The Villager*, *Time* magazine, the *Brooklyn Eagle*, the *New York World Telegram*, and *Times Talk* (a house organ), as well as Meyer Berger's *Story of the N.Y. Times*, *ad* was employed twenty-six times and *advertisement* six. From this proportion one can say that *ad* is a fullfledged word. Usage is divided between the two. Either *ad* or *advertisement* may be employed. Meyer Berger has "The *Times* had a pathetic two-column *ad* . . ." (p. 197) and "it screened and sifted material sent in for its Business Opportunities ads. . . ." The *New York Times* has "using a series of three 1,000-line ads. . . ." The first ad is scheduled for the week of . . ." (December 30, 1953, p. 28) and "the ad men say they could have done better except for the newspaper strike . . ." (December 26, 1953, p. 19). *Time* magazine has "between pages and pages of four-color ads . . ." (January 4, 1954, p. 41). (M. M. B.)

Report and Summary

About Literature

"THE NEW AMERICAN PLAY" IS discussed by William Becker in the winter *Hudson Review*. His contention is that a new genre has developed, the "mood" play, the prevailing tone of which is ennui. Its other characteristics are autotelic character portraiture, faulty or nonexistent plots, dreary repetitions, and evasive flights from action. To prove his point, he analyzes four of this season's Broadway plays, *The Trip to Bountiful*, *End as a Man*, *Take a Giant Step*, and *The Frogs of Spring*. He considers this genre a decadent one and thinks our drama is proceeding toward extinction as drama by this increasing use of mood evocation and character portraiture for its own sake. John Chapman is similarly concerned. Writing in the February *Theatre Arts*, he entitles his criticism, "Cherry Pie Is No Substitute for Meat and Potatoes." He points out that all these plays were reviewed favorably by the critics, that, contrary to general opinion, good reviews do not necessarily bring good houses, and they didn't for these plays. "I have been watching audiences as well as plays," he writes, "and these audiences like myself want something more than we have been getting—want vigor, passion and events—and these qualities should not be at all incompatible with mood and character. It is time for native drama to bust loose."

IRVING HOWE CONTINUES HIS DISCUSSION (third instalment) of Joseph Conrad's political novels in the winter *Kenyon Review*. The one novel in which Conrad handles the political theme with something very close to mastery, Howe thinks, is *Nostromo*, with which this article is chiefly concerned.

THE SPHERE (JANUARY 23) CONTAINS a heavily illustrated article by George Blake on "The Burns Country," which students will enjoy.

TWO ARTICLES USEFUL FOR ILLUSTRATING how authors "create" and also how they "revise" appear in the winter *American Literature*. These are "Revision in Sinclair Lewis's *The Man Who Knew Coolidge*," by Lynn Richardson, and "Edith Wharton's Unpublished Novel," by Nancy R. Leach. Richardson shows that Lewis was a more precise revisionist than some have thought. Miss Leach has had access to the manuscript of a projected novel and writer's notebook of Mrs. Wharton and comments on these to show how that novelist visualized her characters and outlined her plot. She also points out how this projected novel relates to the rest of Mrs. Wharton's work, and particularly to *Hudson River Bracketed* and *The Gods Arrive*. A similar but livelier article, and one especially instructive to neophyte dramatists, is "It Needed Work," by Ronald Alexander, in the February *Theatre Arts*. Alexander is the author of the current play "Time Out for Ginger" (not a "mood" play), and he details specifically the four years of endless rewrites he had to make between the time the play was finished and the time it was produced.

SAUL BELLOW, WHOSE *THE ADVENTURES OF AUGIE MARCH* recently won the National Book Award for fiction, in the *New York Times Magazine* (January 31) tells how he wrote it. The story is of Chicago before the depression, but the major portion of the novel was written in a score of different places in Europe, and the rest of it in

equally diverse spots in the United States, none of them Chicago. Bellow likes to write in a foreign country, he says, because, to quote Robert Penn Warren, if you write in a place where the language is not your own, "you are forced into yourself in a special way." This recalls Somerset Maugham's recent observation that "all the writer has to offer when you get down to 'brass tacks' is himself." Although Mr. Bellow doesn't say so, it is possible that his wide-ranging peregrinations may also have contributed to the picaresque characteristics of *Augie March*.

SOMERSET MAUGHAM OBSERVED his eightieth birthday in January, and a number of periodicals have taken the occasion to survey his work. An interesting interview with Maugham, in which he comments upon his own stories, is contributed to the *New York Times Magazine* (January 24) by Thomas F. Brady. Frank Swinerton, the English novelist and critic, chronicles the changing fortunes of Maugham's literary reputation in the *Saturday Review* (January 23), and a second interview, by Noel Barker, appears in the February *Holiday*. And we certainly hope that by now you will have read the revaluation of Maugham's works by Richard A. Cordell which appeared in the January *College English!* Literature students with *Of Human Bondage* on their semester lists should be interested.

THE BIG AWARDS OF 1953 TO AMERICAN authors are now all made. Ernest Hemingway, who has since then narrowly escaped death in Africa, received the \$10,000 Pulitzer Prize for his short novel, *The Old Man and the Sea*. He had been passed over before, presumably because of the social and ethical clauses in the Pulitzer bequest. The Pulitzer Poetry Prize went to Archibald MacLeish for his *Collected Poems*. W. H. Auden, British-born but now an American citizen, received the Bollingen Prize in Poetry, now awarded by Yale University, "in consideration of his entire lifetime's work." The National Book Awards are sponsored by the American Book Publishers Council, the

American Booksellers Association, and the Book Manufacturers Institute. This fiction award was given to Saul Bellow for *The Adventures of Augie March*, and the one for poetry to Conrad Aiken for his *Collected Poems*.

Saul Bellow's earlier books, *Dangling Man* and *The Victim*, made comparatively little stir. In the winter *Western Review*, published shortly before the National Book Award was announced, Rueben Frank discusses "Saul Bellow: The Evolution of a Contemporary Novelist." *Dangling Man* is said to suffer from a double attitude on the part of the author. *The Victim* shows the author's personal view of life and society clarified, but fails in technique. These experiments over, Bellow presents in a freer and broader manner the picaresque story of *Augie March*. Here the view of life-problems is balanced and sound.

"SHAKESPEARE'S ARENA," BY LESLIE Hotson, previously printed in the *Seawanee Review* and already mentioned in our "Report and Summary," appears in the February *Atlantic*.

Objections to the Hotson conclusion that the stage of the Globe theater was an arena, in the middle of the auditorium, are beginning to appear. The *Shakespeare Newsletter* quotes from the *London Times* the comment that the documents Hotson has found relate to court performances and might not apply to public, permanent playhouses; that there would not be an unobstructed view with the mansions either open or closed; and that to "discover" a scene on the arena stage during action would seem impossible. Also, it seems that the Witt drawing of the stage, which Hotson cites as evidence that there were lords "back of" the stage, shows no mansions. In the same *Newsletter* Edgar L. Klotten cites the opinions of several experts that production of Shakespeare on arena stages has proved very effective. He includes the work of Glenn Hughes at the University of Washington, that of Margo Jones in Dallas, that of Frederick Koch in Miami, and that of Zelda Fichandler in Washington, D.C.

FRANCIS FERGUSON MAKES SOME interesting observations on Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* and *Much Ado about Nothing* in the winter *Sewanee Review*. He thinks the comedies are harder to understand than the tragedies partly because they have not been thought about enough as plays written to be acted before an audience. Laughter depends upon many factors, the mood of the audience, what the audience has been led to expect, etc. Directors today often have to experiment with a comic scene, cutting it, changing its timing, before they can see how it works. Shakespeare probably worked the same way. The best way to learn about Shakespeare's comedy, says Fergusson, is to try to produce it. A more practical method is to imagine an ideal performance as one reads the play, as a musician might "hear" a symphony as he reads a score. What Shakespeare was trying to do in *The Comedy of Errors* and *Much Ado* is made much clearer by such a reading, which Fergusson shows by careful analysis and many examples.

RECENT CRITICISM OF DICKENS' works is surveyed by Fred W. Boege in the December *Nineteenth Century Fiction*. He finds that a shift of opinion is taking place and that Dickens is again coming into his own. His survey indicates three emerging ideas: Dickens, instead of being regarded as an alert publicist who leaped on the band wagon of the reform movement, is now being considered a keen social critic; although he is still being read for fun, today he is read more for his profound sense of the evil in life; the Dickens of the sprawling, chaotic plots is now somehow thought of as identical with supreme masters of the art of fiction. Perhaps the literary taste of our great grandparents was not so naïve as some modern writers have thought!

"Insight, the Essence of Jane Austen's Artistry," by Louise D. Cohen, appears in the same magazine. By numerous examples the author shows that Miss Austen's artistry and technical proficiency resulted from great insight into human behavior and her

use of tiny psychological details which make a whole character come alive.

"DYLAN THOMAS" IS THE SUBJECT of a somewhat rhapsodic article by Edith Sitwell in the February *Atlantic*. She was a personal friend and defended Thomas against early critical attacks. In him and his work she sees religious fervor and animal heat, impetuosity, power, a holy innocence, the spirit of the beginning of created things, and ability to make words fresh and meaningful. He had a splendid voice and was an excellent reader of poetry, both his own and that of others.

"The Poetry of Dylan Thomas" is also discussed by Elder Olson in the January *Poetry*. He finds some of Thomas' conceptions magnificent and his embodiment of them satisfying, but feels that at times the rhetorical tricks appear with no important theme. Thomas is sometimes unnecessarily obscure because he withholds clues to speaker, audience, situation, and subject. Olson cites examples of Thomas' effective use of figures to describe objects or to convey the speaker's feeling—and others that fail. Different titles would have removed the obscurity of a number of Thomas' poems. Thomas, working in the tradition of the fourteenth-century Welsh enigmatic poets, often purposely *delays* the reader's comprehension by oblique language or misleading punctuation—in order to increase the force of the final communication. Olson, writing before Thomas' death, frankly did not know whether Thomas was improving on the whole; he was growing better in some ways and picking up new faults.

"ARE POETS RETURNING TO LYRICISM?" asks Melville Cane in the *Saturday Review* of January 16, and he answers that they should be. Some, like the late Dylan Thomas and the English dramatist-poet Christopher Fry, are doing so. Cane finds the weakness of contemporary poetry to be a hyperintellectualism which distrusts emotion and, in its striving for originality, falls into metaphysical conceits and the use of

private symbols and allusions unintelligible to others. He feels that a poem is not achieved until it has a comprehending reader. The poet of today profits from the greater freedom of form which is now accepted, but some become talkers instead of singers because they stray too far from the traditional verse forms. He does not mention the fact that rhythm is a natural accompaniment (effect?) of strong emotion. Cane would have poets trust their intuition, "and not be afraid of ecstasy." A poem which needs footnotes to make it understandable is not a poem but an exercise in exegesis. Incidentally, Cane remarks that too many of the poets of today are also critics, and he thinks they should have made criticism their vocation. He himself is a New York lawyer who has achieved note as a poet.

T. S. ELIOT IS THE SUBJECT OF two recent articles. Hervey Breit contributes "An Unconfidential Close-up" to the *New York Times Magazine* (February 7), in which he gives a clear and interesting picture of Eliot the man as "the embodiment of paradox." (A good article to which to refer college students. They should certainly understand what a paradox is by the time they get through, as well as have become better acquainted with Eliot.) In the winter *Seawanee Review*, Bonamy Dobrée analyzes in considerable detail Eliot's latest play, "The Confidential Clerk." This he describes as "a comedy, disguised as a farce" in which Eliot reveals himself "as the outstanding English moralist of our time."

SICKNESS AND PRIMITIVISM FORM the dominant pattern in William Faulkner's best novels, according to Melvin Bachman, whose article on the subject appears in the winter *Accent*. He examines six of Faulkner's novels (1929-39) to show this pattern, pointing out that in all six the protagonist is "alone, sick, self-tormented and death-seeking." (This is Faulkner's conception of modern man.) Set against these figures of sickness are the primitives, free from inner conflict, pursuing simple, direct lives. The six novels which he analyzes in some detail are

Sartoris, *The Sound and the Fury*, *As I Lay Dying*, *Light in August*, and *Absalom, Absalom!* Bachman thinks the major cause of tension in each of these novels derives from the conflict between the character who is "sick" and the one who is "primitive."

JOSEPH WARREN BEACH CONTRIBUTES an appreciative essay on Robert Frost to the winter *Yale Review*. He is mostly concerned with what Frost has to say rather than with the manner in which he says it. He discusses a good sampling of the poems to show that Frost has deep concern for the individual and fears losing the personal in the corporate. Frost doesn't like impersonality in social thinking, with the result that throughout his work is to be found a debate between the social and unsocial instincts. He maintains an uncertain balance between cheerful and gloomy views of life. He gives no hint of the natural depravity of man as it appears in T. S. Eliot. Frost doesn't seem to have conceived of evil "with a capital letter, as something with an independent metaphysical existence." He treats his metaphysical themes with the way of a poet and the touch of the common-sense man dealing with actual experience, as well as with the skeptical wit of a man not bound by dogmas or systems. It is the play of mind that intrigues him, and that in him intrigues us.

"SCREEN ADAPTATION," BY JERRY Wald, in the February *Films in Review* is an amusing and instructive account of how the problems of adapting a novel to the screen are met by the screen writer. It is more of an art and more effective than many realize. The two key problems in adaptation are length and changes. Screen writers *must* select, picking out the main thread, the most important characters, the central theme, and the best excerpts of dialogue to make a story of sittable length. "The shortest novel is longer than the longest picture." Screen adapting involves translating ideas from one medium to another. "Only the most gifted of screen writers can *keep the intent, the flavor, the theme and the spirit of the original.*"

Wald gives numerous examples of how these problems were met in adapting *From Here to Eternity*, *How Green Was My Valley*, etc.

IN "ITALIAN MOVIES" (FEBRUARY *Holiday*) Al Hines discusses their current popularity in this country. He thinks it is not just because of their "sex appeal" but

because of their honesty and simplicity, "something lacking in the slicker products of Hollywood." Forced economy doesn't permit the substitution of money for imagination, and this combined with "the human face as against the star face" and with the realism of people and background has caused them to be liked here.

About Education

A NEW NATIONAL HONORARY LITERARY Society for English and foreign language majors and graduate students, called "Lambda Iota Tau," has recently been incorporated. The first chapter was organized last December at Michigan State College, and already five more chapters have been formed at Aquinas College, Hillsdale College, Michigan State Normal College, Purdue University, and Sioux Falls College. The purpose of the society is to recognize and distinguish student excellence in the study of any literature, to insist upon the cultural unity of literatures, and to promote their restoration as the core of a liberal education. It is hoped that one result will be the fostering of an *esprit de corps* among literature students. Projects planned include the publication of a national student literature quarterly as an outlet for student writing, an employment bureau for members, an annual convention, and liaison with national professional societies. For further information address the Executive Secretary, W. L. Fleischauer, Department of English, Michigan State College, East Lansing, Michigan.

THE TEACHER SHORTAGE IS STILL with us, and each month brings news of new programs to help alleviate it. Recently, Teachers College, Columbia University, announced a plan so simple and basic it could (and should!) be adopted by many institutions. During the spring registration period Teachers College is providing a special advisory service for college graduates considering a career in education. The service will consist of aid in choosing educational

work for which the applicant is best qualified and of information on certification, requirements, job openings, and salaries. In southeastern Michigan, where the shortage is particularly acute, Wayne University's College of Education has organized an intensive teacher-preparation program in co-operation with the school superintendents of Oakland County. University graduates and other qualified persons are being offered the opportunity to complete the required courses and workshops and to practice teaching during the spring and summer months to qualify for positions in Michigan schools by September. A program in teacher education also especially designed to help meet the shortage is being established by Northwestern University. It will be offered next fall for the first time by the School of Education in co-operation with the Graduate School. Persons taking the program will be enrolled in the Northwestern Graduate School and after the first quarter will do supervised teaching in public and private schools.

SEVEN LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES IN southern California, with the support of the Ford Foundation, will offer next fall an intercollegiate program of graduate studies in the humanities and social sciences. Its purpose is to develop better means of preparing college and university teachers. Students with a Bachelor's or Master's degree may apply for admission to the program. For 1954-55 ten \$1,200 scholarships are available. Admission to membership in the program presupposes admission as a graduate student to any one of the participating

institutions: Claremont, Claremont Men's, Pomona, Scripps, Occidental, and Whittier Colleges and the University of Redlands. For further information address Dr. Lawrence E. Nelson, University of Redlands, Redlands, California.

THREE HUNDRED SCHOLARSHIPS, each worth up to \$1,725, are being offered for the 1954-55 academic year by eleven colleges under the "Early Admissions Program" supported by the Fund for the Advancement of Education. The scholarships are open to students of high scholastic achievement who will have completed at least the sophomore year of high school by next June. The institutions participating are the University of Chicago, Columbia College, Fisk University, Goucher College, Lafayette College, University of Louisville, Morehouse College, Oberlin College, Shimer College, the University of Utah, and the University of Wisconsin. The 1954-55 scholarship students will be the fourth yearly group to take part in this experimental early admissions program.

ANOTHER PLAN TO ENCOURAGE the superior student, also sponsored by the Fund for the Advancement of Education, is the recently initiated School and College Study of Admissions with Advanced Standing. This is a plan to allow superior high school students to begin their work in college with advanced credit and to enable them to complete the regular college course in three, rather than in four years. The twelve colleges are Bowdoin, Brown, Carleton, Haverford, Kenyon, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Middlebury, Oberlin, Swarthmore, Wabash, Wesleyan, and Williams.

THE SECOND ANNUAL SCHOOL AND College Program for Teachers, sponsored jointly by the University of Chicago and the Chicago Public School system and supported by the Fund for the Advancement of Education, will be held at the University of Chicago June 28-July 30. Its purpose is to help solve the problems of articulation between high school and college, its methods demonstration sections, seminar discussions,

laboratories, and occasional lectures. Sessions will be devoted to English, the humanities, French, German, and the various sciences. Full scholarships (\$120) will be granted. Graduate credit in education will be available for those who apply for it. University housing, library, and recreational facilities will be available to all participants. Capacity of the program is limited. Address inquiries to Mr. Harold Dunkel, University of Chicago, Chicago 37, Illinois.

THE FIRST FRESHMAN COMPOSITION course to be televised was initiated in March by Indiana University, beamed toward adults and high school seniors. College credits will be available to adult viewers. High school principals in the area have arranged for seniors planning to go to college to view the program on TV sets in the schools. High school students will receive a certificate of completion at the end of the course, but not college credit. It is hoped that the TV course will be effective as a means of bridging the gap between high school and college.

"COMMUNICATION ARTS" IN FRANCIS Shoemaker's exposition of "Essentials in Communication Arts and Skills" (January *Educational Leadership*) prove to be something more than listening, speaking, reading, and writing. "Communication, in short, is the symbolic process by which people get life into manageable form." That is, through impression and *expression* people come to understand themselves and all other persons and things, and "understanding" here includes some organization and evaluation. Shoemaker goes on to show by numerous examples that such mastery of experiences comes to many only through the employment of other communication arts in addition to the linguistic ones, and often the employment of graphic or plastic art and music in connection with or prior to the use of language in connection with the same problem situation. His final paragraphs recommend a communication core in which the four language arts and drawing, plastic art, music, and dancing are all included and often blended.

New Books

Professional

LITERARY HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES. Edited by Robert Spiller et al. Macmillan, 1953. Pp. xxii+1456. \$6.75. In the five years that have passed since the *Literary History of the United States* appeared, the dust of criticism has pretty well settled. Those critics who found this distinguished co-operative venture "uneven," as well as the occasional critic who found it all too even ("a common grayness silvers everything," one man wrote), have made the subtractions they considered necessary; and, nonetheless, the fact emerges that here for our generation is the literary history of this country.

The new one-volume edition has a minimum of changes. The text has not been altered. Whatever may have been the temptations to strengthen the few weak spots—most particularly, perhaps, John Wade's chapter on the South and Adrienne Koch's on "Philosopher-Statesmen of the Republic"—the editors have refrained from any rewriting. And the only significant omission in the treatment of the nation's early literature—the failure to discuss the Connecticut wits as a group—also remains.

The changes which concern us are two in number. The first is the addition at the end of the book of a chapter called "Postscript at Mid-century." The second is the elimination of the third volume of the original set, the bibliography prepared by Thomas Johnson. In its place there is a twenty-three-page selective bibliography which he has also prepared. The new bibliography is a useful one in a number of ways, but many a reader will miss the original full volume, which was unique in its scope and richness. Obviously, the entire bibliography could not have been reprinted in the present edition. The problem is complicated, however, for the serious student by the fact that Volume III is now out of print, and, although the publisher has promised to issue it again, he has so far failed to do so.

This is the best, as well as the most popular,

co-operative literary history in the American field that we have had; it is encouraging to see it reprinted so soon.

CARL BODE

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

RECURRENT MALADIES IN SCHOLARLY WRITING. By Eugene S. McCartney. University of Michigan Press. Pp. 141. \$2.50. The recently retired editor of this press says that scholars frequently use circumlocution, cacophonous phrasing, undesirable metaphors, careless spelling, tautology, etc. He says their carelessness puts much unnecessary labor upon university-press editors. Some of his examples are amusing.

STUDIES IN THE HISTORY OF OLD ENGLISH LITERATURE. By Kenneth Sisam. Oxford University Press. Pp. 314. Thirteen essays chiefly concerned with problems of textual transmission of Anglo-Saxon texts, including the poetry of Cynewulf, *Beowulf*, the *Exeter Book*, and Alfred's *Pastoral Care*.

SHAKESPEARE. By Henri Fluchère. With a Foreword by T. S. Eliot. Longmans, Green. Pp. 272. \$5.00. Fluchère provides a brilliant rationale of the last quarter-century of Shakespearean scholarship and criticism. He seems to have read everything, thought through all the findings, and so synthesized these with original thinking as to produce a conspectus of extraordinary depth and range. His emphasis is on the plays themselves. (He excludes the poems and sonnets from his consideration.) After placing the plays within the framework of the period in which they were written and staged, he writes about them simply and directly from both the critical and the aesthetic point of view. In Part I, he discusses "The Spirit of the Age"; in Part II, "Techniques"; and in Part III, "The Themes."

SHAKESPEARE, HIS WORLD AND HIS WORK. By M. M. Reese. St. Martin's Press.

Pp. 589. \$6.50. The author is a historian and an authority on the Tudor and Stuart periods. He writes with distinction and objectivity. His purpose is to provide anyone interested in Shakespeare "with a fairly full and uncomplicated account of his age, his life, and his work." He does this not chronologically but by carrying forward simultaneously the three themes of Shakespeare's art, his life, and his time. It is likely and logical that in classrooms as well as in the library of the general reader, this volume will fall heir to the place occupied for so many years by Sir Sidney Lee's *Life*. Superbly indexed.

SWIFT'S RHETORICAL ART: A STUDY IN STRUCTURE AND MEANING. By *Martin Price*. Yale University Press. Pp. 117. \$3.75. All Swiftians will find this study stimulating. Rhetoric is conceived of both as the traditional art of persuasion and as "the architecture of communication, its structure and ordonnance." Price points out that there is a consistency in Swift's work that can be traced from the simplest to the most complex form, and he analyzes individual works to show how their structure serves to create meaning. His discussion includes chapters on "The Plain Style," "The Method of Wit," "The Ironical Mask," and "The Symbolic Works."

CREATIVE INTUITION IN ART AND POETRY. By *Jacques Maritain*. Pantheon. Pp. 423. \$6.50. Illustrated. The text consists of lectures delivered by the noted French philosopher at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., as the first in a series known as the "A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts." His thesis is the indissoluble relationship between art and poetry, and he stresses the part played by the intellect in creating both. Sixty-eight full-page illustrations.

DIDEROT AND DESCARTES. By *Aram Vartanian*. Princeton University Press. Pp. 336. \$6.00. The sixth volume in the "History of Ideas" series, this is subtitled *A Study of Scientific Naturalism in the Enlightenment*. Its purpose is to reconstruct the history of ideas in the period from 1650 to 1750 and to show the influence of Descartes's philosophy upon the scientific naturalism of Diderot and others.

PERPLEXED PROPHETS. By *Gaylord C. Leroy*. University of Pennsylvania Press. Pp.

205. \$4.75. This is criticism which depends not upon symbol-hunting and straining analyses but upon a common-sense interest in how each of six distinguished Victorian writers reacted according to his individual nature to the new society that all had to face. Nor does the author make a systematic survey of the works of his six prophets, Carlyle, Arnold, Ruskin, Thomson, Rossetti, and Wilde. His interest is in finding out "how the significant attitudes shaping the work of each author grew out of the adjustment he made between his own personal nature and the new society." Of direct interest to teachers and students of Victorian literature.

INDEX AND FINDING LIST OF SERIALS PUBLISHED IN THE BRITISH ISLES, 1789-1832. Compiled by *William S. Ward*. University of Kentucky Press. Pp. 185. \$6.00. Lists all British periodicals published between 1789 and 1832 and indicates in what libraries they may be found, both British and American.

THE STATUS OF FRESHMAN ENGLISH IN SELECTED CATHOLIC WOMEN'S COLLEGES. By *Sister M. John Francis Schuh*. ("Educational Research Monographs.") Catholic University of America Press. Pp. 168. A study by means of interviews of the aims, content, and activities in thirty-four such colleges of from 125 to 850 enrolment.

THE ENGLISH NOVEL: FORM AND FUNCTION. By *Dorothy Van Ghent*. Rinehart. Pp. 473. This series of studies has more vitality, lucidity, and usefulness for the lay reader and student than most recent criticism. Two premises motivate the author's methods: that novels have their primary interest in the light which they cast on life *now*; that they are able to do this only if they are coherent works of art. The volume is divided into two sections. The first (275 pp.) comprises eighteen critical essays on as many classical novels, designed as an accompaniment to their rereading. The second (200 pp.) is composed entirely of *suggestive* questions as an aid to critical analysis and evaluation. The novels are *Don Quixote*, *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Moll Flanders*, *Clarissa Harlowe*, *Tom Jones*, *Tristram Shandy*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *The Heart of Midlothian*, *Great Expectations*, *Vanity Fair*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Adam Bede*, *The Egoist*, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, *The Portrait of a Lady*, *Lord Jim*, *Sons and Lovers*, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

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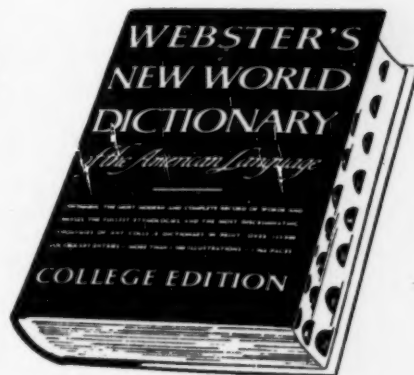
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